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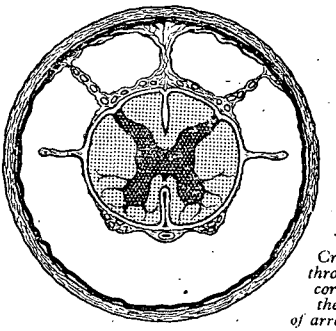

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ARGOSY

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Seen and Heard

LOVELY things these eyes have seen—
Dangling cherries in leaves dark green;
Ducks as white as winter snow,
Which quacked as they webbed on a-row;
The wren that, with her needle note,
Through blackthorn's foam will flit and float,
And sun will sheen.

Lovely music my ears have heard—
Catkined twigs in April stirred
By the same air that carries true
Two notes from Africa, Cuck-oo;
And then, when night has darkened again,
The lone wail of the willow-wren,
And cricket rasping on, "Goode'n—goode'n,"
Shriller than mouse or bird.

Ay, and all praise, would I, please God, dispose
For but one faint-hued cowslip, one wild rose.

WALTER DE LA MARE

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IRISH WELCOME

"Sure," she declared, "I'd give him the roof off the house"

by JIM PHELAN

"TAKE that bucket o' skim milk over to the calves, Maureen. Careful now, there's a good girrl. Timmy, get them goslin's back from the gate—quick, they'll be out on the road in a minit. Wait now, wait now, Dick—don't hurry the mare on them stones. An' Betsy—*Betsy, d'ye hear me?*—slip up an' head off the haythen; sure, he's nearly out in the lane."

The stout, red-faced woman paused only for a series of sharp glances around, to see that her swiftly shouted orders were being carried out. Then she returned contentedly to her occupation of butter-making. Swinging the handle of the big churn with muscular, capable arms, she hummed an ancient butter-makers' tune, and radiated the placid contentment of the peasant lands.

The place was one of those flat, alluvial "bottoms," paradise of the farmer, which survive unspoilt in only a few parts of Europe. Two or three miles away, a blue haze showed where the River Shannon wound a tortuous course to the sea. All around, on the rich, dark soil of what had been, ages ago, the river-bed, small snug-looking peasant farms showed up, flickers of whitewash and thatch, with squares of green and golden tillage between them.

A quiet, calm self-satisfaction, a potent security, rooted in the fertile black soil of the river-valley, seemed to hang with the sun-shimmer over the whole vast, flat region. Miles from a main road, in a district with few villages and no towns, the inhabitants had never heard of modernity, would have laughed at the word as some foreign foolery. Clonasheenan was a peasant paradise.

The O'Reilly farm, where Bridie O'Reilly called orders to her brood in the intervals of butter-making, was like dozens of others in the flat land around. Clonasheenan embraced a score of tiny hamlets, scattered for twelve miles along the river, but it included only one real village.

Strangers, necessarily, were few. Down the long, narrow, crazily-curving lanes, from the big white road that went to Limerick or Dublin, there came nobody except an occasional tramp. Or, even more rarely, a city man on a walking-tour. But

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the casual visitor generally hurried back towards civilization, and away from the fierce, primitive, clinging welcome of Clonasheenan.

That was the only other thing, in the flat land by the river, apart from the placid self-satisfaction, about which there could be no possible mistake. There was hospitality, of an order medieval, for anyone strange or bizarre, anyone from that outside, far-away world of which Clonasheenan was so scornful, but of which it liked to hear, nevertheless.

Even a tramp who told threadbare stories about having been in the First World War could be sure of a hearing. Those who had travelled anywhere abroad, in the preceding twenty years, were perfectly certain of a welcome. For such visitors, there was a whole series of thrill-dumb audiences and a succession of superlatively comfortable temporary homes. Since there was no tavern or hostelry of any kind for miles, that last factor had a certain survival-importance around Clonasheenan.

The O'Reillys of Clonasheenan had lived on the same farm since as long ago as two decades. Or it might have been two centuries—they neither knew nor cared. Daily, Shamus O'Reilly ploughed and sowed in the flat black fields by the Shannon. Daily, as ever since she knew not when, Bridie O'Reilly cooked and sewed and churned the butter, and sent shouted orders echoing across the flats to her numerous offspring.

"Lave them calves be, Maureen—they'll drink time enough. Don't rush them goslin's, Timmy, there's a good boy. Aisy now, aisy with that mare, Dick; an' Betsy, lave the haythen be, he's all right now."

Outside the dairy window, through which her stout, red, smiling face showed from time to time, the children more or less efficiently carried out her orders. Fences were few in the district, the deficiency being generally made up, as here, by relays of children.

Ten-year-old Maureen waited beside two buckets while a huddle of calves pushed their way to drink. Timmy, brown and barefoot, herded a flock of goslings towards the little farmyard. The adolescent Dick rode a rangy mare, barebacked, along a narrow track behind the house. While up the lane came four-year-old Betsy, leading by one hand, as if he were an oversized doll, a middle-aged, sad-eyed Chinese.

The stranger wore the ordinary working-clothes of Clonasheenan—a rough blue shirt, cheap, shapeless trousers, a dark, square-cut coat, and a black slouch hat. With heavy hobnailed boots, they made up his rear view to correspond with that of any peasant in the district, while in front he was of unmistakably Celestial origin.

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He relinquished the small girl's hand as they reached the environs of the farmhouse, and went slowly towards the farm kitchen. An ancient servant-woman said something which, obviously, the Chinese did not understand. But he bowed gravely, and seated himself by the large, old-fashioned hearth. A fire of peat smouldered dully.

"There's a good haythen," said the old woman, smiling pleasantly at the newcomer. "Blow, will ye? Blow. There's a good haythen," she repeated, and made a circular motion with her hand. "Blow, will ye?"

The Chinese rose and bowed gravely again. Then he resumed his seat, to turn the handle of a small fan. The embers of peat came alive on the hearth, as the haythen blew.

None of the O'Reillys knew where he had come from. But, to the peasants, the haythen was a piece of living evidence that the strange outer world of books and newspapers really existed. All Clonasheenan knew a thrill of pride, a consciousness of their own cosmopolitan outlook and contacts, each time they looked at Haythen O'Reilly.

He had wandered down into the maze of lanes, off the Dublin-Limerick road, one morning years ago. No one was ever certain how many years ago. But general opinion dated it as before Timmy O'Reilly was born.

Mike Deegan had encountered him first. Thereafter, for twelve or fourteen years, Mike told the story two or three times a week. Always he stressed his own surprise, when he met a blue-garbed, placid Oriental strolling towards him in the morning sun.

"Sure, ye coulda knocked me down wid a feather," Mike would say, "when I met himself comin' on too-arts me. An' him wid a long girrl's frock-thing on him, an' pointy red shoes, an' a lovely little gold-coloured hat on top of his head."

The peasant listeners always thrilled with surprise, as if they had never heard the story before.

"He'd been thrampin', lost in the lanes," went on Michael's narrative. "Wid the red pointy shoes all muck an' gutther, an' the blue girrl's frock-thing tore by the thorns, an' him afther bein' bullied by the dogs from gate to gate. So I took him into Bridie O'Reilly's an' he dhrank a quart o' milk an' went straight-asleep."

The stranger had slept, exhausted, for many hours. Then he jumped up and glanced at the faces round, none could tell whether in alarm or pleasure. He had spoken much, incomprehensibly, until his hostess was on the verge of tears in her anxiety to help the stranger.

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In the end she seemed to solve the problem with a basin of warm water, followed by a large meal of potatoes and butter, with two poached eggs on top " to keep him from frettin'," as the kindly, red-faced woman explained. Promptly thereafter he had slept again, and had hardly varied this routine for several days.

It was close on a fortnight before he went away. Dicky O'Reilly, then five years old, who had been appointed the stranger's special attendant, ran home howling and tearful with the news that he had gone. The haythen, it appeared, had " just let go of " Dicky's hand, and had hurried away round the bend of a lane.

Shamus O'Reilly had been for dashing out after him, but his wife had intervened. More thoughtful and more practical, she had refused to sanction the pursuit.

" Wisha, lave him *be*," she ordered. " For why should ye follow the dacent craycher? 'Tis a bit of a walk he wants, alone, to be away from the noise of the childher. Why, annyone wants a walk by themselves, some time or other. An' sure, haythens is quare, annyway. Lave him be."

A little over thirteen miles the traveller covered, in the curving, criss-crossing lanes. Nightfall found him halted outside a farm gate, circled by half a dozen howling collies. The farm people took him in, weary and muddy, and he seemed glad to have rest and his supper. Then he was taken home, across two fields, half a mile as the crow flew, to the O'Reilly's house.

He stayed near the house for several days thereafter, apparently satisfied. But inevitably he went again, and again. Always he hurried, wandering for miles in the maze of lanes. Always he was given food and a welcome at the farms, and was then escorted, generally only a little way, back to O'Reilly's at night.

Once he left during the hours of darkness, climbing softly from his bedroom window, no one knew why, instead of using the staircase and the door. He had been absent less than an hour.

All over Clonasheenan, during the day, numerous broods of children made up for the deficiencies of the loosely-made and ill-kept fences. At night, the farm dogs, shrewd and thoroughly trained, herded any straying animal or noisily drew attention to any unusual movement. Close on forty of them surrounded the haythen before he had reached the second lane-crossing.

Thereafter, through the years, the haythen had never again shown any desire to leave at night.

Many times he went off in the early morning, hurrying purposefully through the lanes. But always at such times his hostess reproved any prying or curious inquiry.

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" He's away off for a bit of a walk by himself," was her invariable formula. " Now lave the dacent craycher *be*."

Someone always brought the haythen back.

No one at Clonasheenan knew what language he spoke, and in all his time at the farm the haythen had learnt no words of English. Not that the O'Reillys minded; he was a stranger, and he was welcome, and words were unnecessary.

They never heard where he had come from, and there was always a pleasant sense of awe and mystery whenever Clonasheenan speculated on the stranger's origins. He must have come from a ship, it was always decided, although no one in the valley had ever seen a ship.

Several times, at intervals of a year or two, the newspapers referred to the strange disappearance of a Professor Wong, from Shanghai, who was to have lectured at Dublin University. But Clonasheenan seldom read such paragraphs.

Once, for more than a week, there was general excitement in the valley. The haythen had shown a small card, with the printed words, *Chair of Oriental Verse*, and there had been much discussion at the many farms.

" Poethry of some kind," Michael Deegan summed up, at last. " A chair—wid poethry on it. Would ye have annything like that, Bridie? "

The stout peasant woman clasped her hands, and seemed to be on the edge of tears.

" Sure, I'd give him the roof off the house, the craycher," she declared, while her hearers nodded agreement. " But this about chairs an' poethry is past my—" she stopped, and gradually a pleased smile spread over her face. Then, without another word, she hurried home.

That night, back at the O'Reilly farm, little Betsy bravely mastered her tears and managed to smile approval as the haythen was given her chair for his own. It had been a special present from her father, a gaily-coloured chair, with nursery rhymes painted inside and out.

" Sure, isn't it lovely to see him? " crooned Bridie O'Reilly in delight, as the haythen accepted his present. " A chair wid poethry on it—why, a body never knows *what* little thing could be plazin' him."

The small printed card was shown no more.

Since then, through all the years, the haythen had never behaved as anything but a normal dweller in the valley. He never went unsociably apart, nor did he wear out his strength in long and lonely walking.

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From time to time, automatically it seemed, he would start away up a lane or across a field. But there was seldom need for anything more than the usual shouted orders of the farm, where all the live things tried to stray at some time or other.

"Maureen, head them goslin's back from the gap. Listen, Dick, son, go turn the calves in off the road. An' Betsy, *Betsy*, run down to the gate, there's a good girl, an' bring the haythen back for his tea."

* * *

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DRUMMING OF HOOFS

Between the horse's ears, the stars swung in a dreadful arc

by GARNETT RADCLIFFE

CAPTAIN YUSSUF ALI KHAN of the 3rd Pakistan Field Artillery turned to Sergeant Brown, riding beside him. The sergeant was a visitor from England, temporarily attached to the Pakistan Army as an Andover machine-gun instructor.

With a wave of his hand Yussuf Ali Khan indicated the wide valley. "This is the famous Torch Valley, Brown Sahib. The ground should be sacred to you as an Englishman; more than sixty years ago the Sahibs fought a battle here against the Afridis."

"Is that so?" Sergeant Brown said without interest. He looked at the desolate hills and thought longingly of Sussex.

Yussuf Ali Khan went on, his eyes shining with a Pathan's love of battle: "Look at the plain below. The 21st Horse of the old Indian Army charged across that plain while the Afridis sniped at them from behind rocks. It was fierce, bloody fighting and there were many brave deeds. Presently, I shall show you a place where a British officer called Hanslett jumped his charger across a ravine and cut down three Afridis with his sword. There's a legend that on moonlit nights his ghost reappears, mounted on a spectral horse, and jumps the ravine again."

"Hanslett?" repeated Sergeant Brown. "Do you mean old Major-General Hanslett, V.C.?"

"He became that later, but he was only a second lieutenant when he jumped the ravine. Have you heard of him?"

"Everyone's heard of old Major-General Hanslett. But he's not galloping round these blasted hills. He's lying in a tomb in Westminster Abbey, three thousand miles away, and has been these twenty years."

They rode round the shoulder of a hill, following a track that ran along the edge of a cliff so high that the sergeant kept his eyes averted from the depths below.

After a quarter of a mile they were stopped by a gap in the track. At some time in the past, a great boulder, rolling from the hill on their left, had slashed through the track, leaving a twenty-foot chasm that had never been bridged.

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" Behold Hanslett's jump," said Yussuf Ali Khan. " Brown Sahib, you are a good horseman. Would *you* put a horse at that ravine? "

The sergeant backed his horse. He had a bad head for heights. " Not me! A horse isn't a cat. Look at the slope where you'd land—all loose shale and bushes! "

Yussuf Ali Khan grinned. " Perhaps you would like to see it jumped? Three nights hence there will be a full moon. Shall we come up here and watch the Major-General's ghost repeat his great deed? "

" We'll come up, but we shan't see anything. I'll bet you a hundred rupees."

" Taken," Yussuf Ali Khan said promptly.

Pathans love a sporting bet. When the other Pathan officers of the 3rd Pakistan Field Artillery heard about Sergeant Brown's challenge, they all joined in.

The mess divided itself into two factions, pro-ghost and anti-ghost. The former section was the larger. Ghosts are considered less unusual phenomena in India than they are in England, and among the Northern Pakistan hills are many forgotten battle-fields no tribesman will willingly approach after sunset.

Sergeant Brown scoffed at their superstitions. Yet even he felt impressed when, three nights later, they waited on a ledge overlooking the track along which many years before Second Lieutenant Hanslett had galloped, with Afridi bullets whistling round his head.

Almost the whole mess had ridden up in a gay party from Fort Torch. They had picnicked and joked while the syces watched the horses, but when the moon rose and showed them the Torch Valley in all its grim magnificence, they had fallen silent. There was a spell on the place. Many men had died here and the moon-lit rocks showed like tombstones.

But there was no sign of Major-General Hanslett's ghost. After they'd waited an hour Sergeant Brown turned, grinning, to Captain Yussuf Ali Khan.

" Better pay up, Captain Sahib. The old boy isn't going to oblige tonight. A hundred chips, please."

Hardly had he spoken when a syce uttered a cry of terror. " The Sahib's ghost! Allah deliver us from the Sahib's ghost! "

He pointed with a shaking hand. Where the track rounded the hill, a horseman had appeared, looking larger than life in the moonlight. He was a strange, spectral figure wearing old-fashioned Indian Army uniform and holding a naked sword.

For a moment he sat like a figure carved out of ivory. Then he

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raised his sword and shouted to scare the vultures roosting in the hills. "*At the enemy in front . . . Charge!*"

On the word he spurred his horse to a mad gallop. Then as he thundered nearer, their amazement dissolved in laughter. He was no ghost, he was only a young madcap subaltern called Akmed Khan, tricked up in some old uniform he had unearthed in Fort Torch and riding his own charger.

As he neared the ravine, they stopped laughing. The joke was over, but he wasn't attempting to rein his foaming horse. He was still galloping at breakneck speed, waving his sword and yelling like a demon. They knew then what the boy intended. He was hell-bent on showing Sergeant Brown that a Pathan could ride hard and fearlessly as any Sahib.

"Stop, you young fool!" Yussuf Ali shouted.

The answer was a yell like the scream of an eagle. There was a clash of sparks as the horse lifted to the jump. For an instant they were poised above the black stain of the ravine.

They were over! A shout of relief, and then a cry of dismay. The horse had pecked and fallen on the treacherous shale. It rolled, scrabbling with frantic hoofs. Then it went down with a small avalanche of shale, and seconds later they heard a faint, sickening thud from far below . . .

Only a chance thorn bush had saved Akmed. He was lying limp, precariously suspended above the abyss. The bush was bending, sand was trickling from its straining roots.

The senior Major cupped his hands and called: "Akmed? Rouse yourself, Akmed. Can you hear me?" No answer from the sacklike figure. Akmed was either dead or unconscious.

Sergeant Brown turned away for he couldn't bear to look. He knew there was only one way in which the boy might be saved. But that was impossible. No horse could clear the ravine; no rider would have nerve to try.

"I know I won't," he assured himself. "I'm not quite a mug. All very well for old Major-General Hanslett, but . . ."

He began to walk away. Why think of old Major-General Hanslett now? His having jumped the ravine sixty years ago was no reason why he, Sergeant Brown, should risk his neck now.

Oh, to blazes with it! Suddenly the sergeant wheeled and spoke, almost against his own will. "I'll have a try on Shaitan. He's a good jumper."

"You won't!" Captain Yussuf Ali Khan cried. "The honour must be mine since Akmed is my blood-brother."

"You ride a stone heavier," Sergeant Brown said. "I'm the lightest here and I've had most jumping experience."

No one could contest the statement. He mounted Shaitan, a

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raking black country-bred, and trotted back along the track. His heart was like lead, his hands were clammy on the reins. You chump! Why didn't you keep your mouth shut? You know you can't get across.

It would be just useless suicide. He'd dismount and say he'd changed his mind. Let them think what they liked; he wasn't going to die for nothing.

Shaitan whinnied and pricked his ears. In the act of dismounting, the sergeant paused. There was a drumming in his ears, it sounded like hoofbeats coming furiously along the track.

Shaitan seemed to have heard it too. He plunged forward as if in a race. The sergeant had barely time to settle himself in the saddle before they were in a gallop. Shaitan's hoofs echoed from the rocks so that it sounded as if someone were riding like the clappers of hell at his side, and he no longer felt afraid.

Then the ravine loomed ahead, a black knife-gash in the moonlit road. He steadied his steed, leaned forward on the withers, and clapped his heels to the flanks. A clash of iron-shod hoofs spurring rock, then Shaitan rose powerfully, and for a second he glimpsed boulders like skulls shining far below.

" *Shabash, Shaitan!* " They were well across, and—no, they'd landed too far to the right where the cliff edge sloped like a roof. Shaitan reared over sideways. Between the horse's ears he saw the stars swing in a dreadful arc. He was shutting his eyes against the vision of death when something—it might have been a shooting star—flashed before them like a sword.

Come on the 21st! The words seemed to burst into his mind like the echo of a tremendous shout and they gave him a sudden surge of courage.

" *Come on the 21st!* " he repeated the cry, so that it rang through the valley, flung his weight forward, and wrenched the horse's head down with all his strength. A clatter of hoofs on shale, and then Shaitan suddenly surged up and on like a boat being carried ashore by a wave.

On safe ground the sergeant leapt from the saddle; kneeling, he grasped Akmed's belt. A great heave, and he had dragged the boy to safety. " Concussion and a broken arm," he shouted to the men on the farther side. " He'll be all right."

He heard their exclamations of thankfulness. After a pause he grinned and shouted again: " Hola, Captain Yussuf Ali! I owe you a hundred rupees . . . *I didn't jump alone!* "

★ ★ ★

When one burns one's boats, what a very nice fire it makes.

DYLAN THOMAS

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CHAINS OF SILVER

One cage is much like another —it depends who keeps the key

by ISLWYN WILLIAMS

TWO tiny silver amulets, dangling on silver chains from her nipples, was all she wore above the waist. Her young, pendulant breasts swayed rhythmically as she danced to the lute. Her eyes were closed, her hands crossed over her belly; she glistened with sweat . . .

And then, mused Martin Holland, I was discovered, thoroughly beaten up by the Temple guards, and dragged in chains before the Emperor. It all seemed so long ago. That picture, *The Temple Dancers of Tibet*, had been badly produced and badly cast, but what memories it flashed on the screen of his mind!

The Emperor leaned forward. " Did you not understand that Cha-shung is a forbidden city? Surely the Consulate in Ha-wong told you . . . They must have known? "

" Great One," chanted Holland, " I am an adventure-journalist. The fame of your dancers lured me over the mountains—I *had* to see them. I work for an editor who keeps a whip in his desk . . . I have betrayed no one but myself."

" But after three more moves of Ming-Tso's left foot," countered the Emperor, " Kang the Mighty would have danced on stage and seized her, and the Ritual of the Growing Lotus would have been symbolized. Such a dance may be observed only once a year, and only by me. You have indeed incurred my displeasure. For three years you shall be confined in a cage below Ming-Tso's window, here at the Temple. If you survive that, you will be pardoned and escorted over the mountains to the frontier."

He clapped his hands. " Take him away," he commanded.

Ming was fourteen. She had been bequeathed to the Emperor by a Mandarin of the Fourth Degree in distant Peking—such diplomatic gestures are still customary in the East—and she had been brought to Cha-shung in a litter when she was just twelve. Two years later, as a sign of his pleasure in her, the Great One had given her to the Temple. Occasionally, he attended some ancient and secret ceremony to see her dance and be embraced . . .

The bus was rapidly filling up, and the smell of wet macs and

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umbrellas assailed Holland's nostrils unpleasantly. He wedged himself firmly in his corner, folded his arms, and tried to sleep. His ticket peeped from the hatband of his trilby. A ratlike little man, obviously a fitter's mate in some discontented workshop, sat brooding beside him, eyeing with unconcealed hostility the unreal housewife smiling out from his evening paper.

Outside, the rain teemed down. The lights in the bus filtered under Holland's eyelids. He pulled down his hat-brim . . .

As decreed, his cage with the bamboo roof was suspended under Ming's window on chains, and there Holland lived, summer and winter, for three long years. Ming had clearly been ordered to torture him, and she did so, with the craft of a woman experienced in these matters. Sometimes, when darkness trembled over the city, she would come to her window and call down to him softly: " Fleet Street, Mr. Fleet Street! " That, he had sworn, was his name. It was as good as any he could think of.

For months he had watched her without answering. Then, cunningly, she had got his cage lifted and held out at a greater distance from the wall, so that he could stare into her room. By an arrangement of mirrors, before which Ming burnt tall candles at night, Holland could see her prepare for sleep on the embroidered mat on the floor. When she knew he was watching, Ming would pose for him in the nude, and lift up her breasts with spread fingers. She would press them gently together and sing, so that the sight and sound would drive him crazy.

And sometimes she danced. Holland never saw the lute-player, and after a time, because she danced to the same thin, piping tune, he began to suspect that the Emperor had given her a record-player. No one conforming to his impression of Kang the Mighty put in an appearance, and in his second year of confinement, Holland realized something: Ming was as much a prisoner as he himself.

That winter, she lowered her heater down to him. She's warming to me, thought Holland grimly.

But the brazier saved his life. In it he burnt bamboo chips. Just before dawn, he was fed and watered by a curious ceremonial of long poles, and he learnt to ration his sleep so that he awoke before the last of the dark fled over the mountains. He would put out his hands and take the proffered food and the pots of water, offered up so stealthily—and so briefly.

" Keep your elbows in, mate," complained the greasy little man at his side. " I'm not made of plastic, y'know."

Holland stirred in his half-sleep and muttered something.

" And the sime to you," retorted the sharer of his seat. " These perishin' collar-an'-tie people! "

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By the third winter he was hardened to his captivity, and before it was out, Holland noticed that Ming was growing her hair. Unquestionably. She would parade for him and unbind it, letting it fall over her naked shoulders. She oiled it frequently, and spent hours with a comb at her window. Ostensibly, he paid her no attention, not even when she greeted the morning with some new, breathless coiffure, and preened herself at a mirror of molten silver.

That summer, Holland watched men being dragged to execution in the streets below the Temple walls, and he concluded that, but for Ming, he would have suffered a like fate.

Somebody—or something—was keeping the Emperor sweet, as far as he was concerned, and as the time for his release drew near, he felt with satisfaction that he had cheated the low, square chairs that rested in the blood-stained sand before the House of Ultimate Correction.

On the evening before his cage was due to be lowered to the ground, Ming swung him a key on a long, exquisitely braided tress of her hair. Holland gazed at it, and for the first time in three years, wretched, emaciated, and filthy as he was, he smiled at her.

He tugged gently at the rope of hair. It held firm. Ming had snipped it from her head and tied it to the lattice of her window. With trembling hands, the captive in the cage manipulated the great key into the lock from the outside. He twisted it; the grille swung open. He was free.

Somehow, he climbed the rope. Ming awaited him, two tiny amulets of silver swinging from her breasts. When she had bathed him and shared her evening meal with him, they talked together in low tones as torches flared in the velvet night outside . . .

" Nex' stop 'Ighgit, Mr. 'Olland," announced the bus-conductor.

" Wike 'im up, mate," advised the pipe-fitter petulantly. " 'E's mumblin' abart China."

" Jest you let Mr. 'Olland be," said the conductor. " 'E's one o' *my* people, see. A reg'lar. Fleet Street takes it out of 'em, not that *you'd* know anything about that." He tinkled away proudly.

There was a great clamour outside the door, and the sound of bolts being flung back.

" Ah—Fleet Street," the Emperor greeted him suavely, walking into the room. Behind him, someone was scattering incense. It stung Holland's throat.

Ming was kneeling with her head on the ground. Her mutilated hair covered eyes closed in adoration. Her breasts drooped

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from her like wet, glistening pears. Holland heard the Great One address him, and his voice came from the end of the world. The golden flame of the candles leapt higher . . .

"How well you earned this woman—and your freedom," intoned the Estimable One. "You have both provided me with three years of delectable entertainment, and the climax was worthy of Kang the Mighty himself. At first such restraint and then such passion, such fury . . . I am mightily pleased."

He clapped his hands. "Let pack-mules and guides be brought to the Temple. And let lute-players and flower-girls precede my guests to the limits of the city." He cast not a glance at the rope of hair, lying like a coiled serpent beside Ming's prostrate body.

"You get orf 'ere, Mr. 'Olland." The bus-conductor shook the journalist gently by the shoulder.

The pipe-fitter had gone. Holland stumbled off the bus. It splashed away in the rain. Pulling up his collar, Holland walked sleepily to his home, hands deep in his pockets.

Under the shelter of the brief porch, he tried the handle of the door. It was locked. Swearing beneath his breath, he lifted the soaking mat at his feet and groped underneath it. No key—and he had left his at the office! He was locked out.

He stepped out into the rain and called softly up to the bedroom window. "Ming! Throw the key down."

Moments later, the window opened, and a sliver of silver arc-ed down towards his upturned face. The key tinkled on the wet flagstones. The window shut with a slam, ungraciously.

In far away Cha-shung, the Emperor smiled in his sleep.

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SHINING EXAMPLE

Every night after his work was done, Blackwood would walk through the gardens with his family, and guests, and a couple of dogs who always bore the inherited names of Tory and Tickler, and look out on the distant flicker of the Bell Rock Lighthouse. Perhaps he affectionately remembered one of these walks when he wrote later to Kinglake from Edinburgh: The old gardener at Duddingston, in this neighbourhood, was showing an English stranger the beauties of the loch and Arthur Seat, and when the moon came over the side of the hill, wound up all by exclaiming, "There's a moon for ye! Oh, we're a great nation!"

F. D. TREDREY, *The House of Blackwood*, 1804–1954

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STOLEN WATERS

by THOMAS FIRBANK

"A more haphazard house we had never seen"—so the author describes the home he and his family bought under the north-east edge of Dartmoor. Readers of "I Bought a Mountain" will know they may expect zestful country fare in this extract from Mr. Firbank's latest adventure in home-making, "Log Hut."

THE aura of humans settles thickest about the spots in which they live. Their hopes and dreads; their happiness and misery; their passions, good and evil, permeate the bricks and stones, and linger in the air above much-walked paths. There are homesteads which have little to say; and some which tell of wickedness; and some which speak goodness. Whether you called our new home Log 'Ut, Little Kinglet, or Shallows, it replied always with kindness.

The kindness, however, was sometimes rough and ready. Shallows kept us up to the mark by manifesting faults and irritating habits which saved it from cloying perfection. We had not been unaware of these when we bought. The knowledgeable ale-drinkers of the local inns had told us that the house floated on water, like a raft. Also, a surveyor had looked over the place for us. He had put a few words on a half-sheet of paper but, being a West Country man, had tired, and made his main report by word of mouth. The gist of it was that the roof would bear watching.

We did not then know of the casual, laissez-faire characteristics of Devon folk. We thought that no more was said because there was no more to say. We were delighted that faults were so few, and contrasted the report with one rendered to us by a London surveyor years before when we were negotiating for a house in Chelsea. We had almost broken off the preliminaries when this folio was presented to us.

It was an inch or two thick, and it seemed obvious that nothing could be right. We thumbed over a few pages and found that the subject-matter dealt with lost door-keys, cracked window-panes, frayed electric flex, and even the faded patches on the wallpaper. The cost of the two surveys was identical, but had our London man done the Shallows survey, he would have been writing yet. However, lost keys would not have mattered at Shallows, because we never lock our doors; nor frayed cables, because we cannot shock ourselves off our anaemic fifty volts.

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In fact, we should have bought Shallows even if the committee of the Surveyors' Institute had banded together to send us a black-edged warning. When two people fall in love, the family of neither, in all its wisdom and experience, can put the one off the other. It is sometimes the same between house and would-be buyer.

The rains came during our first month, and not even the garden of Shallows was exempt. Indeed, it attracted more surface water than its share, for an old map, plotting what it called the water easements, showed that every stream in the neighbourhood converged upon our wood and joined one of our two streams. Here and there springs were flooded into life and spurted up through the undergrowth like geysers; and patches of turf, formerly firm, quaked underfoot.

Worse still, the dining-room flooded. A few of the surveyor's roof leaks dripped onto its floor, but most of the water welled up from below in an underhand manner which it was impossible to combat by direct action like plugging a hole in the roof.

We had lived in gum-boots for some days when I met Bert Westmacott as I was trying to do something about a watercourse which was surging down the drive and out under the gate.

Bert lived in a cottage down the lane. He was a tall, well-built man, dark as a gipsy, with fine bones and features that showed that there was good blood in him. We each knew who the other was by country grape-vine, and wasted no time on introductions.

" 'Tis they trees," said Bert, hitching his wet sack round his shoulders. " If 'twas me, I'd tear 'em down. 'Tis naught they do but draw the rain."

I refused to contemplate the destruction of the trees, and said that lack of proper ditches was the trouble.

" Ditches won't do no harm," Bert agreed. " Come Monday I'll give 'ee a hand." He turned up on Monday, stayed two years on full time, and materializes still whenever summat's to be done.

Bert was a man of big ideas. He showed at once that he wished to excavate great embanked ditches, linked one with the other in a complicated system like the German canals. I was more subtle, having been schooled in the hills of Wales. It seemed to me that nearly every morass resulted from some recurrent spring which came to life in sympathy with rain, and that if we found and tapped the springs, the ground about them would become firm.

I started Bert in the quagmire where Tessa, my wife, had foundered on our very first visit. He began the day in Wellingtons, but appeared after lunch in thigh-boots, which were not so readily sucked off. We dug experimentally here and there. Our trenches filled with water, but only with a steady oozing, not the

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spurt of the oil-gusher that I sought, until late in the day I came on a rock, as I thought, and took a pick to it.

The object broke readily, and to my superstitious astonishment began to spray me, immovable as I was in the mud, with a jet of water. Bert feared none of the elementals of the moor, and wallowed in beside me to give the thing beneath the slime a good wallop. That really annoyed it, and it spurted in all directions.

" 'Tis a rare case! " exclaimed Bert, and felt down with his hands. He surfaced with a piece of terra-cotta piping.

" A drain 'tis! Now whatever for be there a drain down in here? "

Drenched with water beyond further care, we tracked the pipe backwards to a brick cistern. Under the turf was a steel manhole, which we lifted and cleaned. Embossed on its lid were the words: *Westhill Water-Supply.*

" Now we've done it! " I said to Bert.

Westhill was the big house across the lane, where once had lived the proprietor of the estate who had put up the original cabin of Log 'Ut.

Bert's face showed more concern at this threat of the physical rather than at the earlier supernatural manifestation, but he rallied after a moment.

" Us'll bury 'un all up quick," he decided. " Westhill's empty, anyway." We agreed on this without too great a sense of guilt, because we had seen that the pipe was leaking at every joint. We did not think that our excavations had done all that much to make matters worse.

However, before we buried 'un all up quick, we cut a deep ditch from the cistern to the nearest stream, laid a double row of four-inch land-drains, and put the earth back on top of them. Bert was distressed at filling in. He maintained that you could not tell that a fellow had been digging.

The affair lay uneasily on my conscience. I felt like a remorseful murderer who has planted the remains of his victim under the cabbages. But the extraordinary thing was that good came out of evil, for the flood in the dining-room receded and finally dried up. We had obviously cut off at the source the subterranean water-supply, and Tessa was delighted until I blurted out the story of the cistern.

After a day or two she suggested that we should stroll over to have a look at Westhill. She pretended that she felt merely normal feminine curiosity about an empty house, but I knew quite well that she was prompted by guilt, now that she had become an accessory. She felt a morbid urge to wander about the place so greatly affected by the crime.

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However, on the way up Westhill drive, Tessa's mind was distracted. She noted a shrub or two which Shallows lacked, and I took a few cuttings with my penknife. We told one another that the bushes were badly in need of pruning, and that we were doing Westhill a good service.

Fringing a pond near the front door was a saxifrage with broad leaves like a water-plantain, a Megasea, which we saw was a winter-flowering variety. The pink petals grew in tight clusters between the leaves. It was not quite the season, but we could see that the clumps were overcrowded, and that we ought to thin them. We did so, slicing through the thick, fleshy stems, which were covered with flaky brown skin, like bad cigars.

Thus laden, we crossed the gravel sweep towards the front windows of Westhill. I stepped on a flower-bed, pressed my nose against a window, and peered within. About an inch away a pair of fierce eyes stared back into mine. I recoiled upon Tessa.

The window opened and a head appeared, whose mouth inquired without preliminary whether I knew anything about engines. I said, a little wildly, that I did; that we did not know Westhill was now occupied; that we were taking a stroll.

"Wait!" ordered the owner of the head. Freezing us, he vanished.

He came out of the front door, and approached with an old-world charm of manner, to which Tessa replied, with a kind of bow, hands filled with greenery behind her back, like a nervous child prodded to present a bouquet. I saw that the ferocity had gone out of the stranger's eyes, introduced ourselves, and learnt that our new neighbour was named Robertson.

In the course of a talk, politely inquisitive on both sides, we found out that the old chap was seventy years of age—although he showed only sixty of them—and that he had been Scottish Prime Minister of an Indian native state. He had ranked seventy-eight servants, including one who preceded him on formal occasions bearing a golden orb on a cushion. Robertson, therefore, had not found it necessary to learn much about the meaner characteristics of engines.

We found the thing lurking in a shed. It was nearly coeval with its new owner, and presented many features of design with which I, born in a later generation, was unfamiliar. Robertson obviously regarded me as a white hope, and watched with child-like confidence as I fiddled gingerly with taps and switches. He explained that they had had practically no light the previous evening because the batteries were nearly exhausted; and, worse still, no water.

This last news reminded us of the pick-axed pipe, and con-

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firmed our worst fears. We discovered, however, that the ostensible reason for the lack of water was that the electric pump would not operate until the engine went.

With the Prime Minister's eye upon me, I tried every possible permutation of the controls, and for a half-hour swung at the handle until my palm was raw. I felt that I owed it to him. As failure succeeded failure, I imagined the old man pining for his seventy-eight servants, who would have filled his cistern with a chain of buckets quicker than the engine and I. I could also feel Tessa praying for me; hoping that by performance of this service we could claim some offset for the destruction of the water-supply.

I had just about given up all hope of success when a negligent and exhausted swing at the handle touched some finer feeling in the cantankerous machine. With a wheeze and a groan it began to chuff.

Robertson was delighted. I could imagine him repeating to some old crony: "These young fellows are every bit as good as we were in our day, Arbuthnot."

Then I remembered about the water. It was more likely that Robertson would say: "The country's changed since we were at school, Arbuthnot. No respect for property now. These young hooligans smash your place up as soon as you take your eye off them."

Robertson asked us to wait just a moment to see if the water-pump worked, while Tessa and I stood like felons on the drop until he reappeared, all smiles. The pump was delivering at gallons a minute, and we must return for a drink in a day or two when the house was straighter.

Tessa retrieved our plants and cuttings from behind a bush, and we went off home much puzzled by the complexities of the Westhill water-tables.

* * *

NOT PUT OUT

Notre Dame des Victoires has been burnt down (I seem to remember) no less than three times. A native of Canada once asked my husband what he considered was the greatest flaw in the Canadian character. This was not a proper question to ask the King's Representative, and his staff held their breath in anxiety to see what the Governor-General would say.

With admirable promptitude he replied "a natural tendency to incendiarism."

SUSAN TWEEDSMUIR, *A Winter Bouquet*

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FLASH IN THE PAN

I will make my kitchen
and you shall keep your room

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

We might be fifty, we might be five,
So snug, so compact, so wise are we!
Under the kitchen-table leg
My knee is pressing against his knee.

Our shutters are shut, the fire is low,
The tap is dripping peacefully;
The saucepan shadows on the wall
Are black and round and plain to see.

KATHERINE MANSFIELD

Bare Sustenance

There was a powerful smell compounded of eau-de-cologne and burning hair (for he had, as usual on these occasions, inadvertently singed his beard) and he kept swearing softly to himself.

"For God's sake come and do my tie, Susannah! I've already spoilt five."

But Mother was preoccupied and unimpressed.

"George!" she said wildly. "The new cook's come, and she's stark naked!"

But Father, wholly intent on his tie, wasn't listening.

"Susannah! I said, Will you kindly tie my tie for me?"

"George, will you please listen to me a moment?"

"What did you say?" he asked abstractedly, fingering his beard. Mother's serene and equable temper was starting to fray.

"I keep telling you, George; the new cook's either mad or drunk or—"

"But is she a good cook?"

Mother stamped her foot.

"I don't know. How should I know? The woman's stark naked, I keep telling you, and she's wandering all over the house . . . The dinner'll be spoilt—that is, if there is any dinner, which I doubt."

"My tie—"

"Oh, damn your tie, George!" Never before in all her married life had she sworn at Father; and now that she had it was

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impossible to say which of them was the more horrified. As for Father, he was quite bereft of his powers of speech for a moment.

"Naked, you say?" he asked, after a shocked pause, profoundly disturbed by Mother's infringement on his prerogatives. "What was that you said about no dinner? Cook naked . . . no dinner . . . am I going out of my mind? No dinner at all?"

"Does a naked cook sound like dinner?" queried Mother desperately.

WILLIAM D'ARFEY, *Curious Relations, edited by William Plomer*

Washing Day

Now, in these fickle springs, there are Monday times
when all the women, their winter thoughts
unfrocked in all the suburbs,
run from their sunlit doors
in bright morning kimonos
over the patio stones in their southern gardens,
over the rain-washed grass,
to toss their pastel laundry under the sky
like floating clouds in freshening winds
up from the tropic gulfs.
Behind the green-gold filigree of hedges
and silvery webs of light,
their moon faces, circled with blowing hair
and milk-white pantomimes of winter arms,
are ivory stamens in their flowered robes . . .
Poised with laundry wickers by garden trellises,
dancing their plastic bodies over the earth,
the women greet the sun . . .

JOSEPH LANGLAND, *In the Suburbs: Early April*

Bottom Drawer

"Make love upon a kitchen dresser!" interrupted Mr. Watkins Tottle; whose ideas of decorum were greatly outraged.

"Ah! On a kitchen dresser!" replied Parsons. "And let me tell you, old fellow, that, if you were really over head-and-ears in love, and had no other place to make love in, you'd be devilish glad to avail yourself of such an opportunity. However, let me see—where was I?"

"On the dresser," suggested Timson.

CHARLES DICKENS, *Sketches by Boz*

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Doing His Bit

The chimneys, rank on rank,
Cut the clear sky;
The moon
With a rag of gauze about her loins
Poses among them, an awkward Venus—
And here am I looking wantonly at her
Over the kitchen sink.

RICHARD ALDINGTON, *Evening*

Domestic Bliss

"So here I am," I thought, "mistress of my own world in my own kitchen," and I looked at the shining steel of the range and the china on the dresser glittering like jewels, and the dish covers, hanging in their row from the big venison one on the left to the little chop one on the right, as beautiful as a row of calendar moons, and the kitchen table scrubbed as white as beef fat and the copper on the dark wall throwing out a glow to warm the heart, and the blue delf bowls like pots of precious balm. And then beyond where the larder door stood ajar you could see bottles of oil and relish and anchovies and pickles and underneath the lid of the big flour-bin as white as its own lovely flour, I call it a treat for queens to sink your hands in new wheaten flour . . . You would say I was putting out in buds like a shallot with my big kitchen heart in the middle and my little hearts all round in the empire of those good faithful offices, all fitted up as they were, even the cupboards, in the best of country materials. The very shelves in the boot-hole were oak, and the fruit racks were sweet apple . . .

So I looked round me that night and many more afterwards in the Tolbrook kitchen, and prayed: "Let me only live cook in this dear place and not die too old for the work, and I'll never want another heaven."

JOYCE CARY, *Herself Surprised*

Homecraft

O Art of the Household! Men may prate
Of their ways "intense" and Italianate—
They may soar on their wings of sense, and float
To the au delà and the dim remote—
Till the last sun sink in the last-lit West,
'Tis the Art at the Door that will please the best . . .

AUSTIN DOBSON, *Household Art*

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FINIGAN WAS AFRAID

He disliked that dark-haired spitfire but he wanted her

by DAVID WALKER

MARCUS FINIGAN skidded a last hairpin, stormed the rise, squealed to a standstill, and switched off. The hill air was wonderfully crisp now in late October after the monsoon. It was quiet, too, but the radiator hissed and bubbled.

Finigan stretched indolently and yawned to take the hum out of his ears. He had climbed, as usual, at maximum speed, but now he was here. " We're here because we're here because we're here because we're here—" he sang to announce arrival. There were places where Finigan was less than welcome, but Ramshai tea garden was an old port of call.

He hoped that his hostess would be somewhere around. She was. Anna Graydon came out onto the verandah.

" Marcus! " she said in a pleased and pleasing tone of voice.

" I knew it would take my breath away," Finigan said. " And you have. ' Be aisy now,' I was saying to myself at every twist and precipice. 'Absence makes a man grow warmer. Be aisy, Finigan.' And what do I find? A more heavenly dream than all my dreams. I'm knocked flat speechless, Anna."

She laughed. " Just as speechless and awful as ever. But I'm glad to see you, and we're very glad you've come to shoot that horrible panther."

" I wouldn't say ' come to shoot ' in such a luck-tempting way, not after three years and eighty-one human suppers, and nobody ever hit the black Beelzebub yet that I know of. But with them upping the reward, and you planters adding to it—well, here I am for another try."

Finigan swung out of the jeep. He stretched and yawned again, and covered his large moustache, party manners. He was an outsize, black-haired man. He eyed Anna leaning over the verandah rail, and he reflected that many a true word was spoken in blarney.

" By the way," he said, remembering business, " did John pass round my hardy-annual message that nobody's to touch a kill till I get there? "

" He sent word everywhere last night. I must say it does seem

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hard on the poor relations—having to let them be eaten, too, I mean."

"It is hard," Finigan said. "But so is shooting man-eaters."

"Even the thought makes me shiver. What will you do, Marcus?"

"I'll wait till something happens. I'll just curl up at nights on my sad lonesome in a corner, if you have one."

"We have one, but it's only a camp-bed in the living-room, I'm afraid. You see, my sister's staying with us, and—"

"Your sister?"

"She's been travelling all over India and Pakistan and heaven knows where else." Anna Graydon looked out by hills and valleys to the plains far away. She was a gentle, rambling, rather cryptic person. Then she glanced at Finigan and smiled to herself or him, and said, "Come and meet Katrina."

"My blood pressure's dangerous high already. A second like the first would explode me altogether. But lead on." He followed Anna into the living-room.

"Mercy me!" he said. "Who did that?"

The canvas was propped against a wall. It was an oil, a thing of strong light and shade and slashing colour. The river came wickedly in spate, and growth burst crudely on the valley sides, and the far snow mountain . . . Finigan had an eye for beauty of every kind. He knew that place. But it was many places that he knew. It was the violence and fecundity and peace of India. A bold daub was the only thing in this pleasant, conventional room. It swallowed this room up.

"Katrina did it. She's a professional artist, and very good—not that I feel comfortable with her paintings, somehow. We haven't been able to let Robin out much lately because of the panther, so Katrina gives him drawing lessons, which is a pure waste of time."

The woman and the small boy sat at a garden table. "No, Robin," she said impatiently. "Not like that. You don't have to draw every twig. You just have to think what a tree is like altogether, and then you'll make a much better tree. Look! It's easy."

"It isn't easy for me," said the light, petulant voice. "I'm not some old artist."

"The great Robin Hood himself!" called Finigan. Robin Graydon jumped in his chair, swung round, knocked crayons flying, yelled, "Finigan!" and came at a gallop. He was eight years old. "Oh, gosh!" he said; then shook hands gravely.

"Wot's bin doin', chum? Killed many tigers, elephants, leopards, rhinos, wolves, king cobras, or hyenas?"

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" Just one huge python," Robin said. " I strangled it." Quite the wag. He stared up at Finigan. " Oh, gosh," he said again. " What about a walk? I'm not allowed walks lately because of that stinky panther. But I could go with you. Can we go now before tea-time? "

" Katrina, this is Marcus Finigan."

Finigan put his hairy fist on the boy's shoulder. " Tomorrow," he said. " Tomorrow, if the panther doesn't need me, and if Auntie doesn't need you to draw trees in the altogether." He took his hand away and looked up.

Katrina Earle was as dark as her sister was fair, as different as the tiger-lily is different from the rose. I might have guessed it by that picture, Finigan thought. He noticed many interesting things, not excluding a frosty fire about the eyes. It was, perhaps, a pity that he had ignored her while telling Robin that he could come for a walk tomorrow if Auntie did not need him to draw trees in the altogether. But that was usual Finigan.

He looked at her, and sensed an *ab-initio* antagonism. The hostility of a beautiful woman was apt to bring out a deplorable Finigan. It did now. " *Some old artist!* " he quoted admiringly. The tall, dark man stared down at the tall, dark girl, atmosphere electric suddenly out of nowhere.

Her lips met and parted, but she said nothing. She nodded coldly. Finigan watched her go back across the lawn and stoop to pick up crayons. Anna Graydon smiled. Life with one volcano was sometimes a strain. Would two volcanoes cancel each other out?

" Finigan! " for the fifth time.

He wrenched his gaze around. " What is it, Robin Hood? "

" How d'you know to come here after the black panther? It hasn't been at Ramshai."

" It hasn't killed at Ramshai," said Finigan. " But it killed once seven miles up this ridge, and it killed once four miles down, and it killed once on the second ridge north, and once on the next ridge south. That's two brackets in a month."

" What's brackets? "

" A soldier's word. It means one shell over and one shell short, and put on your tin hat before the next one."

Katrina Earle was coming back.

" You know, Robin," Finigan continued, " people think I just go prowling about like a roaring lion, seeking bravely what I may happen to devour in the line of man-eaters—I bet you couldn't mix a better metaphor than that one, Anna—Well, as I was saying, people think I do it by luck and a dash of spittle, but I don't. I have a little man-eater map, and I mark up every

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kill. Mostly, all the care and skill is wasted, but once in a blue moon my scientific hunches turn out right. Then I'm near enough to get on a fresh kill—not that even that's a good chance.

"I have scouts all over the country, Robin Hood. When anybody does anything, the drums beat a message to dear old Finigan. You couldn't even have a drawing lesson without me hearing on the bush telegraph, not now I know about Auntie."

"You seem to be a thoroughly systematic killer of things, Mr. Finigan," said Miss Earle, first verbal contribution.

Finigan did not like that. "I am indeed," he said blandly. "My little Irish mother, she used to say to me, 'Marcus, me darlin',' she used to say. 'I see the writin' on the wall, and the writin' I see is that nothing but Holy orders could save Marcus Finigan from the hangman's noose.' Well, I never was a priest and I'm not hanged yet."

John Graydon arrived then from the tea garden.

". . . So there we were, me with a jammed rifle, and the leopardess crouched on that branch not six feet from my defenceless head, and her tail switching slow over and slow back."

Finigan paused and shuddered. Tense audience in the living-room, curtains drawn. "You know—" he digressed, "you know, it's a right mysterious thing in my experience that the females are the most dangerous and cruel . . . Could you explain that, Auntie Kate?"

"I could not," she said. "And my name is not Kate."

"Go on, Finigan! What happened?" Robin bounced with impatience, all eyes and ears, and mouth an O.

"I knew there was only one hope. I stared that leopardess out. I stared at her, and she stared at me. We might have stared all day, except that there's a limit to my patience."

Finigan sprang from the sofa. "There she is," he whispered. "There she is with her slit eyes glaring at me, and the muscles bulgin' beneath her spots, and her tail switch-switching, and the hate-mutter in her throat. What can I do? What can I do and my heart going hammer-hammer—yes, it hammered that time—and one hand on my knife and the other clubbing a useless rifle? What can I do?"

Katrina Earle's canvas no longer dominated this room. Marcus Finigan dominated it, a stealthy leviathan of a man, pale-eyed and merciless, sliding one foot back past the other, slowly, so slowly he hardly moved.

"The rock's behind me. Just let me have that rock on my flank, and I'll be a match for a panther. She can kill me, but I can stab her. I've reached it. I'm there now. Just one more

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step, and I'll duck in behind, and she won't charge then, I don't think she will.

"U-ug-gh-h-h! She springs as I jump for safety, and she comes in a spread-eagled flash of hate, and her claws rasp along the rock, and she gets me—she tears flesh from my side like tissue-paper, and I smell her fetid stink—and she's gone!"

Robin's hair stood straight on end. They breathed again. Nobody knew whether this melodrama was taken from life. Finigan, the male lead, was not quite sure himself by now.

"Tell us another, Finigan! Just one."

"No, darling," said Anna. "You'll have nightmares, as it is."

The boy grumbled and went to bed. "You've earned yourself a drink, Marcus," said good John Graydon. "You, Katrina?"

"No, thank you." She wore bright colours. She smouldered in bright colours. Her hands lay quiet in each other.

Finigan poured himself whisky and dabbed it with soda, and the spirit swirled, oily, strong. "If that painting is a typical example," he said, sitting down beside her, "you're just like your paintings." He did not mean to be facetious. He was going to say how much he liked it. It was time to establish friendly relations with this artist.

She glanced at him. "And you?" she said gently. "Are you just like your blood-thirsty little stories?"

Finigan swallowed. He was well used to hostility, but not to hostile wits as nimble as his own. "I don't know," he said. "I don't know blood-thirsty me any better than you know arty-tarty you. All I know is I'm no oil-painting."

"A daguerreotype, perhaps?" pronouncing it "dagger."

"Stop this brilliant bickering," said John, "and come to dinner."

Finigan was a perfect gentleman afterwards. "You've done the Taj Mahal?" he inquired seriously. "Fatehpur Sikri? The Towers of Silence? Tughlakabad? Udaipur?" and so on.

Katrina said yes to all of these.

"And you painted pictures of every one?"

"I did a few sketches."

"For notes, that would be, would it?"

"Yes," she said guardedly.

"Well, it seems to me you've done the country from top to bottom. It seems to me you could go home to dear old Blighty now, this minute, and be a foremost female authority on the Indian republic. You could give lectures to the Little Tooting Art Society."

Katrina Earle stood up. "You're the most insufferable, arrogant, conceited man I've ever met. You're a smug little fool, too.

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Good night." Across the room and down the hall, and opened her door and shut it—shut it very quietly.

" Smug! " muttered Finigan. " Them's fightin' words. Nobody ever said I was smug before . . . Would you call me smug, Anna? "

" No," she said. " But I would call you very unkind and very provoking."

They went to bed. " I don't know what got into old Marcus tonight. Why did he needle the poor girl like that? "

" My granny had a rhyme. She was a coarse old thing, and I think it's slightly coarse:

Gentle soul and fiery head
Lie at peace in feather bed.
But oh, if like doth like espy,
In bed or out the feathers fly."

" Heard coarser. What's it mean? "

" It means they're the same, silly! "

" Well, we're the same kind of people, and we're not at each other's throats, figuratively speaking."

" No, but we're phlegmatic creatures, and they're dynamite. Besides, they're desperately attractive to each other. Didn't you see? "

" Woman! "

Finigan lay on his camp-bed. You're old enough to know better, he told himself. You're old enough not to want to take that raven-headed bombshell, and put her over your knee and—I wonder what she's thinking down the hall beyond that door? Be aisy now.

But he could not be aisy.

" I'm sorry I was a rude bad boy," he said at breakfast. " This is going to be too fine a day for anything but peace. O.K.? "

" All right." Katrina actually smiled at him. She looked tired.

" Mummy teaches me old lessons all morning," Robin said. " So that's no good. But we can go for our walk straight after lunch, can we, Finigan, can we? "

" Yes, Robin. You and Friar Tuck will take a dander, always excepting a miracle occurs and there should be panther business. Aunt Katrina permitting, too."

" Aunt Katrina likes walking," she said.

Robin grunted. He glowered at his scrambled eggs.

Katrina laughed. " Men only. I'll make up for lost sleep this afternoon. I spent most of last night thinking of devastating answers."

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"Me, too," said Finigan. "Only it wasn't just answers I was thinking." Everything in the Himalayan garden was lovely for that moment.

It was after four when the man and the boy came out of dense hill forest and down by the orderly terraces of tea. Today Finigan had a valuable package as companion in man-eater country, so they had gone by the hill road, which was disappointingly tame for Robin.

"Finigan," he said now, "when I'm a bit bigger, Finigan, could you teach me shikar? Could I really come with you and really shoot a tiger and a panther and—"

"You could," Finigan said, "if you still want to when you're old enough, and if you're still as tough a chap as you are now, and if I'm still in circulation, and if you don't expect me to take you after dirty man-eaters. I'll be old then and you'll be young, and Robin Hood will learn to be as good a hunter as Marcus Finigan."

"Oh, gosh! Promise?"

"I promise," Finigan said.

"Could I just feel your rifle?"

Finigan unloaded and handed over. It was not a weapon he allowed to be bandied about.

"It's awfully heavy."

"Double-barrelled rifles are. But that's the lightest, biggest-punching one in all India. Finigan special."

There were sounds—a babel of human voices suddenly, as happens in the many-angled hills.

Finigan listened a second or two. He took the rifle back. "Come on!" he said, and ran.

The men were straggling up to the bungalow, short, thick-calved men of the hill breed, a merry people. But they were not merry now. "Fig'gan!" was the word they shouted.

Finigan had not required to hear their version of his name to know there was trouble. He had known the particular kind of trouble the moment their voices came into earshot. It was an old, familiar sound to him.

"Silence!" he bellowed. A man wept among them. "Speak!" he told the headman. Finigan knew the poor hamlet that they came from—two miles down Ramshai ridge.

It was a boy called Dorji. At that name Finigan heard a hiss indrawn behind him. Dorji had been herding goats not far from the village. He had screamed once. That was soon after noon, and the men had gone in with sticks, and the headman with his gun. The panther had snarled from cover.

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"Fools!" shouted Finigan. "Thrice-misbegotten sons of owls! Did I not say that the body must be left?"

"But he was my only son of eight years, sahib."

Finigan did not look at the father. But he did not hesitate to be brutal. An old woman no one would bother about; a girl the parents might mourn; but a boy, the most precious thing in this land—

"I come to rid you of this panther," he said slowly and quietly, with venom. There was dead silence now, for Finigan's rage was a thing to terrify more than simple villagers. "I say that the body must be left, because thus is the only good hope that the panther will return to its kill. I give my orders and you disobey them. You bring back one boy who is already dead. So you condemn many other people."

"But, sahib—" from the father.

"Silence! Go now and wait for me, and we will put the body in the place it lay. I, Finigan, command it. Go now, fools! Run!"

They turned and fled. He shrugged his shoulders. Panthers were the most cunning and the boldest, the most wary and the most unpredictable. There was still a faint chance.

Robin was crying, Katrina's arm round him. "What happened, Robin darling?"

"Dorji was my friend, and the panther killed him, and they went and got his body, but Finigan says they have to put it back! I don't want Dorji to be eaten by a horrid panther!" The child was racked with sobs.

"I don't either," Finigan said. He was the villain in such scenes, but he happened to be the villain who risked his life. He was planning fast now, and he had no thought for anybody's feelings. "Shikaris don't cry," he said irritably.

Robin ran into the house.

"You're so cruel," she said. "And so cold-blooded."

"Look," said Marcus Finigan. "I wish you'd go and paint little pictures, and leave me to mind what happens to be my business."

"Killing business! Killing is all you ever do. I may paint badly, but—"

"Where's Anna?" he broke in savagely.

"The car."

"You'll do, then. Find me food—cold meat and bread. And I want strong coffee. Hurry up!"

Twenty minutes later, Finigan drove alone down the mountain road. He kept his hand on the horn button, and he hugged the

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hill, now swinging into a ravine, now racing out to the next shoulder where cliffs dropped two thousand feet or more.

They awaited him. "Are there trees for a machan at this place?"

"There are not trees, sahib," the headman said.

Which would make things more unpleasant in several ways. Finigan put on his coverall suit. It was in one piece, enclosing the feet like a small child's pyjamas. It was his zoot suit, his anti-leech suit—not that anything would keep them out altogether.

"Five men will go with me," he said. "Then you will return loudly. But this night there will be silence in your houses, and no one will come again until I call. Do you understand?"

They understood. The father bore his dead son in blood-stained rags. The others followed loudly. Finigan brought up the rear. Sunset had not yet come, but the sun dipped over a western hill and the day was fading. He urged them on.

"Here, sahib," said the headman. It was a fairly open place astride the ridge, a hollowed saddle breaking the declivity. The grass was grazed short even now after the monsoon, and there were ferns and scrub bushes.

It was not a good place to sit up for a man-eater. They hardly ever were good places, and this was worse than most.

Finigan sat against the rock, facing downhill. A small cliff flattened again eight or ten feet above his head. He knew one way the panther would be apt to come, if it came. This was a damp spot, too, and the leeches here at four thousand feet were terrible. He saw a few now beside him, weaving slimly at the scent of blood.

He fastened up zoot suit, fitted hood behind ears and round forehead, and laced it tight. He was warm and waterproof, if not quite leechproof. His suit was camouflaged brown and green. He had blackened his cheeks with charcoal. His hunting-knife lay beside him. He put a glove on his left hand, and another minus the forefinger on his right.

The father knelt by his son forty feet away downhill. He did not weep. Finigan switched on the five-celled torch that was clamped along his rifle. The beam was so powerful that even now in daylight it lit a circular patch. The sights lined up in the centre of the beam. Good.

The stocky hillmen looked from him to his aiming mark and back. They were an utterly different breed from the men of the Bengal plains, thirty air-line miles away.

"Go now!" said Finigan in exactly their intonation. "Go loudly, my brothers!"

They went. "Come, Budmash!" one of them called. "Come,

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black son—" Unprintable, and there was laughter of a kind, much loud talk dwindling down to the village, silence.

Finigan leaned back against the rock. There was a slow drip of water, drip and drip again at seven-second intervals. This drip might keep him company for a long time; his mind recorded its frequency now at the beginning.

He looked downhill to learn the picture for darkness—the brown bundle which was focus—three small bushes on the right, like See and Speak and Hear No Evil—fern patches darkening amid grass—rocks to the left—all the near picture framed by mountains. Only at one place did the clearing break sky, and that was west of south, where hills ended and plains began.

Finigan closed his eyes and saw his picture, not as it looked now, but as he knew it would look by night. Southern night was in a hurry. It chased sunlight up hills to the east, laid pink on northern snows, snatched warmth from plain and mountain. Night was here.

Finigan was here, too. He should have been here much earlier, for the carnivora most fashionably pay return calls at the boundaries of night and day. But he had reached here in time to learn the place. He had positive and negative things to do. He listened and watched; he sat still.

He heard the far talk and song and drums of people, above, below, across; the bleat of a goat in the near village, the river rumble down ahead, the climbing whine of a car; the eerie, epidemic howl of jackals, and the watchdogs' protest. He heard these and the drip beside him and other unimportant sounds of night.

The only difference between his adequate pair of large ears and those of an ordinary man lay in the small selective messages they brought him. After Finigan's thousand-and-umpteen nights, his ears picked and chose at positive morsels.

Negatively, he sat still. He could sit the whole night through without stirring. A negative thing, and his most deadly accomplishment. He was not naturally a patient man. He had taught himself to dismiss his body—to banish numb backside, tickly throat, or aching knee. But it was mind that empowered him to be the most motionless animal in the jungle.

Nothing came, and the young moon dipped on its right-hand course, and Finigan was in shadow. He was glad of the moon, for his eyes were not so sharp as usual. He had lost the better part of one night's sleep. He was offended at this. It was a long time since Finigan had lost even an hour's sleep, except through business or through such pursuits as he himself elected.

He had a bone to pick with Katrina Earle. He disliked that

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sharp-tongued spitfire. But he wanted her. Finigan was very human and not altogether nice.

He saw her now on the hillside in the light of the setting moon. She wore flamboyant colours against pale skin.

So cruel and so cold-blooded . . . You asked for it, Auntie Kate.

The dead child lay in a discernible huddle. Finigan did not relish cadavers any more than the next man. But he had long since learnt to ignore the human identity of man-eater kills. You could not afford to think of them in terms of pain and grief; you did not want to. They were bait.

But he had a sinner's weakness for eager childhood, for quick tears and joy, for whole trust—the very young things lost long ago. There would be no more fun for the goatherd of eight years—a lively age in a land where youth fades fast. It could have been Robin, he thought, and painfully.

What's that?

It was the lightest pit-pat on leaves. Again. Too quick. It was not a panther. He saw the small animal cross and stop, fearful and furtive.

The jackal did not see him here in shadow below the rock. He watched and heard the jackal. It departed as a dark streak—gone. Even the jackal had virtue as a hearing aid.

He heard something very soon. He did not hear it above and behind him—in Finigan's vulnerable quarter. He heard a slow rustle down on the left—that one rustle and no more, while the tiny water clock measured out time beside him. Drip. Drip. Drip.

Finigan's eyes switched left and right. The moon dulled to the horizon. Soon it would go. It went.

The sky was clear, and the night was darker, and he saw something where he had expected to see a circling panther.

He saw a fourth dim splodge beyond the monkey bushes, See and Speak and Hear No Evil. Sure? Yes, sure.

Now what? Wait for it to go onto its kill? Best chance if the kill were tied. But there was no tree to take a rope, and there had been no time for driving a stake; stakes—a doubtful, noisy, suspicious-looking proposition anyway. The panther might do what he had often known them to do—grab on the run, and this a small burden of fifty pounds or less. If it should do that, there would be no possible chance of a shot.

Finigan raised the barrels from his knees. He had to make a right-hand swing, which was the harder direction. He had to make it in a single tide of movement so slow that even a cat's night eyes would not be drawn to the difference, to what was not quite what it was a little time ago. This was the best thing to do,

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and Finigan did it as stealthily as it could be done. The muzzle crept to that shadow.

Now, very soon, after ten more degrees of tortoise traverse, he could switch on his light, blind the animal for the moment he would need. Now . . . Now . . . N—But the panther was gone.

Finigan's vituperation was internal. He addressed himself suitably, and he addressed the panther. Of all dangerous mammals, the panther, the leopard, *Felis pardus*, was the only one he hated. He hated this particular melanistic mutant, black variant, killer of small boy, victim No. 82, outwitter of Finigan, public enemy of these Himalayan foothills—he hated it viciously.

Nothing, nothing, nothing, and the night went on, and he suffered leeches on face and under gloves; heard them roll down, gorged; felt blood trickle. He continued motionless for dark time that was immeasurable, and yet was measured in his instinct to about two hours before dawn.

Drip. Drip. Drip. But that had changed. It did not drip every six or seven seconds. It came every twelve, every fifteen. Then it stopped altogether. A steady flow of water did not dry up thus. Cause and effect. Something had dammed the infant trickle. It could be a slip of earth. It could be any number of things. The alarm bell, true or false, rang loudly in Finigan's defenceless head.

A few vertical feet to the ledge above him. He did not move. Stillness was not now a negative arm of the offensive. Stillness was now a negative deterrent weapon. They balked at it. They liked their prey to show signs of life.

Was that a noise? The water came suddenly again. It poured with small splashings, and steadied to drip, and something else came too. A few pebbles or earth particles pattered on his head.

Finigan was almost certain that the panther stalked him. He was perfectly certain when a touch of night breeze, of the down-rolling, pre-dawn air, wafted a feline whiff.

He did not think the black devil would attack him if he kept still. He kept still, knowing that the black devil was hungry for its favourite flesh, had been cheated once tonight, was capable of absolutely anything at any time.

If it jumps out and down and turns, Finigan thought coldly, I have a fifty-fifty chance at least. If it slithers over and takes me from above, I don't stand one chance in a row of corpses.

He waited. Black brute, I'll get you. I'll get you now while you get me. Or if I get out of this, I'll get you. I'll do nothing else until I get you. He thought also, incongruously, of a young woman in a warm bed up the hill, of a warm young woman who said he lived to kill. Should've sent her an invitation.

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He could see dawn's first dim penumbra over the river above the high mountains while he waited for what he expected.

But that did not happen. A panther coughed once down the ridge to his left. Gone. Dawn came, and the sun delayed behind lofty walls, and was born strong, and flies were busy in the hollow.

Finigan exploded from stillness. There was nobody to see him dance out the cramps. He was very hungry and somewhat anaemic, and he did not admire a beautiful morning. Sleep crowded his head. Two nights were nothing, but this last one had been a gala without the prizes.

He watched a lammergeyer, a bearded vulture, an immense bird with a nine-foot wing-spread. It soared the next ridge and sailed the nullah to this one and out at a great height over the river, and back; it quartered Ramshai ridge twice on morning inspection, and wheeled tightly above this one place only. There were no other victims to interest the lammergeyer. It disappeared. This added testimony to Finigan's opinion. The panther was still hungry.

He applied an iodine pencil to leeches on the job, fat and lean. They were allergic to iodine. He inspected pugmarks on the ledge. They belonged to the right panther. It must have removed its attentions from him about an hour before dawn. Worth while making a chukker, circling?

There were goat and dog noises, but an unwonted human hush down at the village. They still obeyed instructions, and justified harshness, whatever fools and bairns might think of cold-blooded Finigan.

But he reproached himself for being unkind to Robin, who was his friend and the friend of Dorji. Hurting a good little fellow like that, Finigan thought. I don't know what gets into me. Now if only I was a decent, kind chap like Jim Corbett. Well, I'm not, and I'm not so good as he was.

The panther would not come again. "A-a-ai-i-i!" he called.

They came running. "It is finished," he said tersely. And because he liked these hill people, and had been rough with them, he added, "I am sorry. The panther came, but I could not shoot. Now I make a chukker."

He started uphill. They would find the pugmarks above his rock. Finigan's perils would to some extent compensate them, as well as enlarging the Finigan legend. All to the good.

It was not the smooth circle described with a compass; the hills were far too broken and precipitous for that. But in general effect, he made a clockwise circle about the centre of the panther's kill. There were times of the year when steepness would be the

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main difficulty. But now, after more than a hundred inches of monsoon rain, steepness was incidental to rank undergrowth.

Finigan sweated and slipped and struggled down north; then he swung his general direction east towards the river which drained the whole of this ridge-and-nullah country, running at right angles to the teeth of the comb. He heard a car pass riverward. He moved slowly. The time was nine and the going was hellish.

Finigan did not want to meet the panther on panther-loaded terms. He thought the panther had moved elsewhere, and it would be a help to know the initial direction. He climbed south again, back up the side of the ridge.

He was lucky. The tracks crossed him. They followed a grassy shelf, below rock and above rock, a fault in the stratum and a natural path. They were a few hours old at most, excellent tracks in mud-grown grass. They were so fresh that a green blade came unstuck and stood again. The panther had walked down the left side of the shoulder, making for the big valley three thousand feet below.

He followed for some distance. Yes, unless it changed its nasty mind, that was where it would go. Finigan was not pleased and not surprised. Uphill, its scope would be limited by difficult, sparsely inhabited country. Down there, it could stroll up- or downstream and take its choice from twenty needles of the comb. Finigan knew that such was the habit of this particular man-eater, and he knew that was why the so-and-so had survived. It rang the changes up and down and along and up. Tonight it could be five miles away as the crow flies, fifty miles by road.

He went into the village, where he removed a new crop of leeches, washed blood and charcoal from his face, drank tea, ate coarse chapatties spread with ghee, and ate two of the local green-skinned oranges.

"The panther has gone," he told the headman. "Do not fear tonight."

Finigan spoke also with the father. "I shall kill the killer of Dorji, your son." But he did not know how he would kill that killer.

He found a shade tree away from village sounds and smells. Hillmen were no great shakes in hygiene. He heard the loud, melodious note of a magpie—"Kokli," it called, and made discordant noises. The breeze blew scents to him, sweet and musky.

Finigan slept. *There's something just behind us, Marcus. I know there is. I know there is.*

It was after two when Finigan reached Ramshai. Anna

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Graydon was waiting on the verandah. "Oh, it's you, Marcus. I thought it might be the others. What happened?"

"It came," said Finigan. "But I couldn't shoot." Anna did not seem quite her easy-going self. "Where are the others?"

"Katrina and Robin went down to the river. She said the light would be exactly right, and there was just one thing she wasn't satisfied with about that picture, and they would be back by twelve."

"Oh, well," Finigan said, "you know these artists."

"Yes, Marcus. And it's perfectly safe in a car, of course, and I know I'm being silly, but after that poor Dorji child yesterday . . . That was really the reason I let Robin go—because he was so sad about Dorji. Generally, he forgets troubles in no time, but he didn't."

Anna looked at Finigan. "I know I'm an idiot to fuss, but they're two hours late. John's away, too; he took a sandwich lunch to the other end of the tea garden." Her voice trailed off. Mother in a stew, often good reasons for mothers to be in stews in this far and lovely and treacherous land.

"Which road did they take?" asked Finigan casually. There were roads of sorts down both sides of Ramshai ridge, and the left one was little used—but he had heard a car.

"The left one," said Anna, listening. She was in a most untypical stew, or tizzy, and not for good reason. Some kind of mother's hunch.

"Don't you worry your lovely head," Finigan said, "because there's nothing to worry about. I tell you what, I'll just take a run down to meet them." He got back into the jeep.

"What about lunch, Marcus? You must be starving."

"Ate at the village half an hour ago." Untrue. Four hours ago.

He waved and drove off unhurriedly.

As soon as he was out of sight, Finigan put on speed. Logically, there was nothing to worry about, but Finigan was all Irishman, and he respected the forebodings of people he respected. It did happen, also, that the panther had moved along this north side of the ridge.

The panther might follow Ramshai ridge as far down as it could, or it might not. This particular black panther was not old and sore, like many man-eaters. It was an exceedingly hale animal, impelled by hunger, limited by geography and by a need for rest. There was one place—

Finigan dropped ear-popping altitude from five thousand to four to three, and high above him, just about here, was the village of No. 82, small Dorji. He raced, braked, skidded, corrected,

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cornered, threw his weight as she began to tip, out again and round.

Now, if I was that black fiend, what would I do?

Just ahead the road swung left; now out and round another buttress of the ridge; it dipped to cross the nullah bed. The road changed from north side of south ridge to south side of north ridge. It had to, because Ramshai ridge petered out altogether, ending in the capricious and jagged fashion of that country, in a staircase of sheer precipices dropping the last thousand feet to a flat glade this side of the river. All river-bound travellers change here, even panthers.

The small car stood on the bridge. It was jacked up and minus the left front wheel. It faced in this direction. A puncture—nothing unusual about that; you could pick up more thorns, cactus spikes . . . What seemed less usual was that Katrina and Robin were nowhere to be seen.

"Hey!" called Finigan on the bridge, but his voice was lost in the loud torrent that tumbled to a brink.

He investigated. Back seat lifted out to get at the tools. Tin box of oil-paints. Stretched canvas, face upwards; good picture out of place. Woman's purse lying open. Spare wheel had air in it, all right.

"Hey!" he shouted. Nothing.

Which way? There could be ordinary explanations, but—Finigan did not like it.

He liked it even less when he found their tracks at the damp outer verge of the road, tracks leading back the way he had come—a woman's shoes and a boy's shoes. What he did not like one little bit was that the tracks were made by people turning to look over their shoulders. Robin had gone first, and she had followed. Some of the way she had walked backwards—heels indented. They had retreated uphill for a hundred yards or so to the place where the road swung right to climb along Ramshai ridge, the place where Ramshai ridge itself came to a vertical full stop.

Here, the footmarks left the road. Here also, Finigan saw pugmarks of the black panther. "Oh, cripes," he muttered. You could drive on a flat tyre, but not on a hub. The panther must have shown itself just at that stage of the proceedings, harried them to here, and pinned them. Pinned them where?

Finigan guessed where. To the left, as he faced now, was a sheer drop; to the right rose the massif of the ridge; ahead was a two-foot ledge curving along the face of the cliff.

"Hoy!" he called again. The sound came back to him—the unfamiliar, dwindling echoes of a man's own shout.

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He scrambled to the beginning of the ledge. Human tracks; no panther tracks. Panther lurking above Finigan's head? No.

Finigan started along the ledge. He went silently in his jungle boots, but not securely, for rubber grips poorly on wet rock. The ledge went out and round the convex cliff. Finigan had not followed it far when he saw Katrina Earle.

She faced the other way, presenting him with a rear-view of terra-cotta sweater and small waist and long curve of hips in woman's trousers.

Finigan was not at present interested in an opulent shape against a far blue sky. He was interested in the fact that she stood stock-still on the narrow ledge. She stood with a curiously gripped intensity. He hissed once. Her head did perhaps jerk a fraction. Her shoulders stirred with breathing. He also saw young Robin's legs and feet this side of her. Robin was crouched in a hollow of the rock wall.

Perfectly obvious. The black devil had pinned them to this ledge. Then it had whipped round somehow or other to take them from behind. Panther tactics. But Katrina had been able to turn. Now she was looking to where she knew the panther must be; or she was staring the panther out.

No room to shoot past her, not possibly. Was she face to face with it? Finigan could not be sure, but he thought so. Yes, he thought that stillness . . .

If so, the panther was also engaged in a stare-me-out competition, which might continue until something new happened—a sight of Finigan, a sound from Finigan, a pebble dropping, a movement of hers—anything at all could break the slender thread that was taut from the panther to Katrina Earle.

Try to get round and take it from behind? Probably the panther could not turn. In the first split second it sensed menace at its back, it would move in the direction it was facing. Was she armed? She might be holding something, but her elbows were too far back—it couldn't be a rifle.

Finigan looked at the cliff above her head. There was a tree of sorts up there, leaning at a crazy angle from the rock. Could he get a shot from above?

It was the best and only hope, and time was no ally. Finigan turned outwards for fear of striking the rifle. Turning outwards was not nice. He did not admire the toy valley to the east; and he did not admire the snow ramparts of Kanchenjunga to the north.

Finigan sprinted like hell. He was rising forty, and he could still run. He ran down to the jeep for his tow-rope. It was a good strong rope, one inch in diameter, thirty cumbersome feet of

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it—might be needed. He ran back. He panted, but it was solid air down here at two thousand, warm air to sweat in.

He struck up behind the cliff, up the steep beginnings of the ridge that plunged just on his left. He had the drunken tree as marker. He was above that now. He crawled on hands and knees down the grass slope to the edge.

Oh Lord, he thought with true piety, don't let me slip. He inched his head to look over the drop. One good spit—or to be more accurate, one lobbed pebble—would fall unchecked a thousand feet to the valley floor.

Finigan clung to a tree-root. Katrina was a little to the left of his position, and not far below in terms of a thousand feet. Her face was drained white under black hair—a perfectly still face; it wore that ineffably imperious well-bred-English expression which can be so riling to lesser mortals on lesser occasions.

She stared along the cliff. In her left hand she held a minute pistol. Finigan knew what it was—a single-shot .22 peashooter such as globe-trotting ladies carry in purses or handbags. It might discourage a nervous train robber. It was only slightly more use against a panther than a bow and arrow would be against a General Patton tank.

Katrina Earle held her weapon steadily in that spatulate-fingered artist's hand.

Finigan could not see the panther's head and body because they were hidden from him by an outjutting slab of rock just above the ledge. But he could see the black tip of the panther's tail. It switched slowly and flatly across the ledge and out over nothing and back. *I am a hungry cat*, said the tail, going out. *I stalk you*, coming back.

The ledge swung to the right and into a ravine. It was evident how the panther had reached its present position. The panther knew every passable inch of its mountainous bailiwick. The panther knew where it could and could not go. It never slipped and never had vertigo.

Marcus Finigan did. He shut his eyes and shook his head and opened his eyes. He saw past one occupied, and two, three, four, five unoccupied ledges to Buddhist prayer flags fluttering in a treetop.

The extra makes no difference, he sweated cold. *I'd be just as dead if I fell from that tree.*

He shut his eyes again. "*You're the most insufferable, arrogant, conceited man I've ever met. You're a smug little fool, too . . . Killing is all you ever do . . .*" "*Finigan, when I'm a bit bigger, Finigan, could you teach me shikar?*"

There they were, and here was Finigan with the jitters. *Come*

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on, you yellow-bellied bag of dizzy wind, he reviled himself. *Get on with it.*

He got on with what he knew he had to do. There was nothing else he could do. He put a hand on the tree-trunk and pushed—seemed solid enough, although lord knows how, with roots in crannies. He went back for his rope, crawled down to the edge again. Quiet, he told himself, quiet, you bum.

He put the spliced metal eye of the rope over the trunk, drew it round and under and back to him, threaded the end laboriously through—slow, slow, slow, quiet, quiet, quiet—all thirty-odd feet of rope now untidily coiled beside him on the grass verge of the cliff. The panther must not hear and the panther must not see. The tail switched out and back, out and back in wicked grace. I love you, panther, Finigan thought. I love you, leopard, me little darlin'.

He pushed the looped end out and up the trunk and tightened. He measured the distance by eye again. He thought it would be short. It had to be short, but not too short.

He paid the rope out slowly and more slowly, until it was nearly all gone, and still above the slab of rock that hid it from the panther, still a foot or two above, so hard to judge foreshortened; and all done as quietly as one time long ago scaling a wall to his girl's room, with her mummy sleeping in the next room.

Finigan let the last of it fall. It snaked and hung steady. Katrina still stared out the panther. She might or might not know that the cruel and cold-blooded Finigan was on his dizzy way. She had given no sign.

That's as good a thing as ever I saw a man or a woman do, thought Finigan. Now! Now, holy old Moses, if you love me, let me do this right.

He slung the rifle on his right shoulder. That leather strap had freed his hands for many nasty moments less nasty than this. He edged his two hundred solid pounds out from the bare tree-trunk of untested strength. He gripped the rope with his left hand. The tree trembled and gave a faint root groan, and held.

He let his legs drop over, and hung for a moment like a man half on, half off a horizontal bar. He found the rope between feet, then between knees. He let go with his right hand. He unslung the rifle—light for a double, but still heavy, as he had told young Robin—and particularly heavy when held with one hand at pistol-grip far behind the point of balance.

Finigan was a strong man who bent steel pokers for conceit, but there were time-limits to this particular small feat of strength

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when he had to shoot straight at the end of it. With one hand and two legs, going down a rope was nothing. Finigan did the last part of his slither fast, and perhaps too noisily; for as the slab of rock came up, he saw that black tail cease to switch, and ripple out straight to quiver with ecstatic, diabolical decision.

The sort of thing they do for sure is pot you in the kidneys, he thought, very rationally.

"Don't shoot!" he yelped as he opened knees and feet, and slid the last six feet, and shot the black panther one-handed between the eyes while it uncoiled in vocal, terrible discharge of strength, and Finigan's finger streaked to the second trigger, and he gave it that one, too.

The first slowed it; the second high-velocity bullet almost stopped it. The panther's forepaws failed to claw Finigan's khaki shirt, and it toppled over and over in death throes and down, and slapped the next staircase ledge and bounced, and stopped miraculously on No. 3.

Finigan clung with his left hand to the rope. He turned slowly round. "I wish you wouldn't point that damned little thing at my stomach," he remarked to Miss Earle.

She looked down at the pistol and dropped it. It did not stop on any ledges, but went clatter and again clatter and finally small bang. It had been loaded, and it may have ended below the prayer flags. She looked at him.

"Oh Marcus!" she said.

Finigan looked at her. "You're a good, brave girl," he said. He looked out over the ice-fed river, cold between its hot, green banks, and he looked north to Kanchenjunga, where a plume feathered out from the highest inviolate peak. "There's your painting," Finigan said. It was not quite the composition of her painting, but near to it.

"To hell with my painting," said Katrina Earle.

It had been a very trying afternoon. Finigan was tired and sleepless and shot full of adrenalin. He experienced a powerful surge of desire. He slung rifle, relinquished lifeline, took three steps, and lodged his left hand in a crevice. Thus anchored, he bent his head to kiss her violently, receiving as good measure as he gave.

"What are you doing?" asked Robin with understandable impatience from his nook.

"Nuth'n'," Marcus Finigan replied.

"Please stop that stinky kissing, Finigan. Couldn't we go, please, Finigan?"

They went.

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" One thing that beats me," Finigan said later, " is how you had the guts to stare the brute out. And the second thing is how you knew that was the only hope."

" You told us," she said. " You told us the other night. Actually, I was loathing you so much at the time because of some unbearable chestnut about females being deadlier than males that I hardly took it in. But as soon as we were on the ledge, Robin whispered, ' Finigan said, stare it out is the only hope.' Didn't you, Robin? "

" Yes, I did," Robin said, with pride. " I was sort of awfully scared stiff, but I said that, Finigan."

" Well, now. Well, I never did."

" But you did say it, Finigan."

" Yes," he said. " I know, Robin Hood." Finigan seemed off balance. " It's a dark old world of sinful prophecy," he muttered, " and a rare case of Finigan's fiction being stranger than Finigan's fact. You see, I made that little story up, Robin."

" You mean it wasn't true? " For the second time in two days Robin bestowed an anguished look upon his hero. " I thought you always told me true things," he gulped. " And then you make up just fibs, and then Dorji gets killed, and then—" This small and plucky boy had had enough.

" There's my pal," said Finigan helplessly. " There's a tough fella."

" Robin, he's an awful man, but don't you think what happened this afternoon is a much better story than the one he made up? "

" Oh, gosh, yes—I hadn't thought of that."

Finigan put on the wheel, screwed up the nuts, lifted the pint-sized vehicle with one hand, and kicked out the jack. He was a big boy now, and still a muscle-man.

" Jeepers, you're strong, Finigan."

" Quite the little Hercules," admired Miss Earle, but thoughtfully.

" That'll be all from you."

" What about getting the panther's body, Finigan, and what about the rope? "

" Not me," he shuddered. " Not me for a lac of rupees. Let some goat of a hillman risk his neck." Finigan was not often afraid, but he had met fear today.

It was next afternoon, and they were alone together in a high place. " You really must go? "

" I must," he said, " before the moon gets too full altogether, and that old man up there grins all over his wicked face."

" He wore a small, lop-sided grin last night, I thought."

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Finigan laughed. "You're sure you wouldn't like Beelzebub's black skin for a little bit of a fur coat? It would set off your rigging just something lovely."

"No, thank you. One meeting was quite enough." Katrina shivered and smiled at him, and looked at the mountain. "Were you being funny about my painting? Or do you really like it?"

"I love it," he said. "I love all about it."

"I'd like to give it to you, then. I'd like to give you something, Marcus."

"I don't have a house," he said. "I don't have anywhere I could hang a picture that I love."

"Nowhere?"

"Not a place at all," said Finigan. "That's the kind of chap I am, Katrina."

"No presents," she said. "No fur coats of yours and no pictures of mine. No space in our baggage for souvenirs. That's such a lovely thing, but people wouldn't understand it." She was crying. "I'm happy," she said.

The sun dips round and the wind blows cool and clouds roll over the great mountain. "Au revoir, Kanchenjunga," said Katrina. "Good-bye, afternoon."

"*A wand'ring minstrel I*," Finigan sang in his trusty jeep, "*a thing of shreds and patches . . .*"

They made lively if imperfect harmony on the way down to Ramshai tea garden, where they parted, these nomadic people.

★ ★ ★

SECOND-CLASS SLEEPER

The moment we landed, we ran into trouble. My trunks were so full that I had asked Jacques Charles to put one of my dresses in his luggage. The Customs found it and made a great to-do because Jacques had declared he was a bachelor.

We took rooms at the Ritz. A day or two after our arrival, the manager took me aside and said that Jacques Charles had been seen by one of the American lady residents going into my room and would we mind, for the sake of the proprieties, being more discreet in future. There was nothing whatever between Jacques Charles and me, as it happens, but I would have died sooner than tell him so. I looked at him innocently.

"But . . . how do people manage to make love in this country then, if they aren't married?"

"They cater for that sort of thing in the lower class of Station Hotel, madam."

MISTINGUETT, *Mistinguett: Queen of the Paris Night, translated by Lucienne Hill*

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★ SCIENCE FICTION CHOICE

SHAPE

Remember, the lure of Exotic Shapes is not sanctioned

by ROBERT SHECKLEY

PID the Pilot slowed the ship almost to a standstill. He peered anxiously at the green planet below.

Even without instruments, there was no mistaking it. Third from its sun, it was the only planet in this system capable of sustaining life. Peacefully it swam through its gauze of clouds.

It looked very innocent. And yet, something on this planet had claimed the lives of every expedition the Glom had sent.

Pid hesitated a moment before starting irrevocably down. He and his two crewmen were as ready now as they would ever be. Their compact Displacers were stored in their body-pouches, inactive but ready. Pid wanted to say something to his crew, but wasn't sure how to put it.

The crew waited. Ilg the Radioman had sent the final message to the Glom planet. Ger the Detector read sixteen dials at once, and reported, "No sign of alien activity." His body-surfaces flowed carelessly.

Pid noticed the flow, and knew what he had to say. Ever since they had left Glom, Shape-discipline had been disgustingly lax. The Invasion Chief had warned him; but still, he had to do something about it.

It was his duty, since lower castes such as Radiomen and Detectors were notoriously prone to Shapelessness.

"A lot of hopes are resting on this expedition," he began slowly. "We're a long way from home now."

Ger the Detector nodded. Ilg the Radioman flowed out of his prescribed shape and moulded himself comfortably to a wall.

"However," Pid said sternly, "distance is no excuse for promiscuous Shapelessness."

Ilg flowed hastily back into proper Radioman's Shape.

"Exotic shapes will undoubtedly be called for," Pid went on. "And for that we have a special dispensation. But remember—any shape not assumed strictly in the line of duty is a device of The Shapeless One!"

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Ger's body-surfaces abruptly stopped flowing. "That's all," Pid said, and flowed into his controls.

The ship started down, so smoothly co-ordinated that Pid felt a glow of pride. They were good workers, he decided. He just couldn't expect them to be as Shape-conscious as a high-caste Pilot. Even the Invasion Chief had told him that.

"Pid," the Invasion Chief had said at their last interview, "we need this planet desperately."

"Yes, sir," Pid had said, standing at full attention, never quivering from Optimum Pilot's Shape.

"One of you," the Chief said heavily, "must get through and set up a Displacer near an atomic-power source. The army will be standing by at this end, ready to step through."

"We'll do it, sir," Pid said.

"This expedition has to succeed," the Chief said, and his features blurred momentarily from sheer fatigue. "In strictest confidence, there's considerable unrest on Glom. The Miner Caste is on strike, for instance. They want a new digging shape. Say the old one is inefficient."

Pid looked properly indignant. The Mining Shape had been set down by the ancients fifty thousand years ago, together with the rest of the basic shapes. And now these upstarts wanted to change it!

"That's not all," the Chief told him. "We've uncovered a new Cult of Shapelessness. Picked up almost eight thousand Glom, and I don't know how many more we missed."

Pid knew that Shapelessness was a lure of The Shapeless One, the greatest evil that the Glom mind conceived of. But how, he wondered, did Glom fall for his lures?

The Chief guessed his question. "Pid," he said, "I suppose it's difficult for you to understand. Do you enjoy Piloting?"

"Yes, sir," Pid said simply. *Enjoy* Piloting! It was his entire life! Without a ship, he was nothing.

"Not all Glom feel that way," the Chief said. "I don't understand it, either. All my ancestors have been Invasion Chiefs, back to the beginning of time. So of course *I* want to be an Invasion Chief. It's only natural, as well as lawful. But the lower castes don't feel that way." He shook his body sadly.

"I've told you this for a reason," the Chief went on. "We Glom need more room. This unrest is caused purely by crowding. All our psychologists say so. Another planet to expand into will cure everything. So we're counting on you, Pid."

"Yes, sir," Pid said, with a glow of pride.

The Chief rose to end the interview. Then he changed his

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mind and sat down again. "You'll have to watch your crew," he said. "They're loyal, no doubt, but low-caste. And you know the lower castes."

Pid did indeed.

"Ger, your Detector, is suspected of harbouring Alterationist tendencies. He was once fined for assuming a quasi-Hunter Shape. Ilg has never had any definite charge brought against him. But I hear that he remains immobile for suspiciously long periods of time. Possibly he fancies himself a Thinker."

"But, sir," Pid protested, "if they are even slightly tainted with Alterationism or Shapelessness, why send them on this expedition?"

The Chief hesitated before answering. "There are plenty of Glom I could trust," he said slowly. "But those two have certain qualities of resourcefulness and imagination that will be needed on this expedition." He sighed. "I really don't understand why those qualities are usually linked with Shapelessness."

"Yes, sir," Pid said.

"Just watch them."

"Yes, sir," Pid said again, and saluted, realizing that the interview was at an end. In his body-pouch he felt the dormant Displacer, ready to transform the enemy's power source into a bridge across space for the Glom hordes.

"Good luck," the Chief said. "I'm sure you'll need it."

The ship dropped silently towards the surface of the enemy planet. Ger the Detector analysed the clouds below, and fed data into the Camouflage Unit. The Unit went to work. Soon the ship looked, to all outward appearances, like a cirrus formation.

Pid allowed the ship to drift slowly towards the surface of the mystery planet. He was in Optimum Pilot's Shape now, the most efficient of the four shapes allotted to the Pilot Caste. Blind, deaf, and dumb, an extension of his controls, he directed all his attention towards matching the velocities of the high-flying clouds, staying among them, becoming a part of them.

Ger remained rigidly in one of the two shapes allotted to Detectors. He fed data into the Camouflage Unit, and the descending ship slowly altered into an alto-cumulus.

There was no sign of activity from the enemy planet.

Ilg located an atomic-power source, and fed the data to Pid. The Pilot altered course. He had reached the lowest level of cloud, barely a mile above the surface of the planet. Now his ship looked like a fat, fleecy cumulus.

Still there was no sign of alarm. The unknown fate that had overtaken twenty previous expeditions had not shown itself.

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Dusk crept across the face of the planet as Pid manœuvred near the atomic-power installation. He avoided the surrounding homes and hovered over a clump of woods.

Darkness fell, and the green planet's lone moon was veiled in clouds. One cloud floated lower.

And landed.

"Quick, everyone out!" Pid shouted, detaching himself from the ship's controls. He assumed the Pilot's Shape best suited for running, and raced out of the hatch. Ger and Ilg hurried after him. They stopped fifty yards from the ship, and waited.

Inside the ship a circuit closed. There was a silent shudder, and the ship began to melt. Plastic dissolved, metal crumpled. Soon the ship was a great pile of junk, and still the process went on. Big fragments broke into smaller fragments, and split, and split again.

Pid felt suddenly helpless, watching his ship scuttle itself. He was a Pilot of the Pilot Caste. His father had been a Pilot, and his father before him, stretching back to the hazy past when the Glom had first constructed ships. He had spent his entire childhood around ships, his entire manhood flying them.

Now, shipless, he was naked in an alien world.

In a few minutes there was only a mound of dust to show where the ship had been. The night wind scattered it through the forest. And then there was nothing at all.

They waited. Nothing happened. The wind sighed and the trees creaked. Squirrels chirped, and birds stirred in their nests. An acorn fell to the ground.

Pid heaved a sigh of relief and sat down. The twenty-first Glom expedition had landed safely.

There was nothing to be done until morning, so Pid began to make plans. They had landed as close to the atomic-power installation as they dared. Now they would have to get closer. Somehow, one of them had to get very near the reactor room, in order to activate the Displacer.

Difficult. But Pid felt certain of success. After all, the Glom were strong on ingenuity.

Strong on ingenuity, he thought bitterly, but terribly short of radio-actives. That was another reason why this expedition was so important. There was little radio-active fuel left on any of the Glom worlds.

Ages ago, the Glom had spent their store of radio-actives spreading throughout their neighbour worlds, occupying the ones that they could live on. Colonization barely kept up with the mounting birth-rate. New worlds were constantly needed.

This particular world, discovered on a scouting expedition,

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was needed. It suited the Glom perfectly. But it was too far away. They didn't have enough fuel to mount a conquering space fleet.

Luckily, there was another way. A better way. Over the centuries, the Glom scientists had developed the Displacer. A triumph of Identity Engineering, the Displacer allowed mass to be moved instantaneously between any two linked points.

One end was set up at Glom's sole atomic-energy plant. The other end had to be placed in proximity to another atomic-power source, and activated. Diverted power then flowed through both ends, was modified, and modified again.

Then, through the miracle of Identity Engineering, the Glom could *step* through from planet to planet; or pour through in a great, overwhelming wave.

It was quite simple. But twenty expeditions had failed to set up the Earth-end Displacer. What had happened to them was not known, for no Glom ship had ever returned to tell.

Before dawn they crept through the woods, taking on the coloration of the plants around them. Their Displacers pulsed feebly, sensing the nearness of atomic energy.

A tiny, four-legged creature darted in front of them. Instantly, Ger grew four legs and a long, streamlined body and gave chase.

"Ger! Come back here!" Pid howled at the Detector, throwing caution to the winds.

Ger overtook the animal and knocked it down. He tried to bite it, but he had neglected to grow teeth. The animal jumped free and vanished into the underbrush. Ger thrust out a set of teeth and bunched his muscles for a leap.

"Ger!"

Reluctantly, the Detector turned away. He loped silently back to Pid. "I was hungry," he said.

"You were not," Pid said sternly.

"Was," Ger mumbled, writhing with embarrassment.

Pid remembered what the Chief had told him. Ger certainly did have Hunter tendencies. He would have to watch him more closely. "We'll have no more of that," Pid said. "Remember —the lure of Exotic Shapes is not sanctioned. Be content with the shape you were born to."

Ger nodded, and melted back into the underbrush. They moved on.

At the extreme edge of the woods they could observe the atomic-energy installation. Pid disguised himself as a clump of shrubbery and Ger formed himself into an old log. Ilg, after a moment's thought, became a young oak.

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The installation was in the form of a long, low building, surrounded by a metal fence. There was a gate, and guards in front of it.

The first job, Pid thought, was to get past that gate. He began to consider ways and means.

From the fragmentary reports of the survey parties, Pid knew that, in some ways, this race of Men were like the Glom. They had pets, as the Glom did, and homes and children, and a culture. The inhabitants were skilled mechanically, as were the Glom.

But there were terrific differences. The Men were of fixed and immutable forms, like stones or trees. And to compensate, their planet boasted a fantastic array of species, types, and kinds. This was completely unlike Glom, which had only eight distinct forms of animal life.

And, evidently, the Men were skilled at detecting invaders, Pid thought. He wished he knew how the other expeditions had failed. It would make his job much easier.

A Man lurched past them on two incredibly stiff legs. Rigidity was evident in his every move. Without looking, he hurried past.

"I know," Ger said, after the creature had moved away, "I'll disguise myself as a Man, walk through the gate to the reactor room, and activate my Displacer."

"You can't speak their language," Pid pointed out.

"I won't speak at all. I'll ignore them. Look." Quickly Ger shaped himself into a Man.

"That's not bad," Pid said.

Ger tried a few practice steps, copying the bumpy walk of the Man.

"But I'm afraid it won't work," Pid said.

"It's perfectly logical," Ger pointed out.

"I know. Therefore the other expeditions must have tried it. And none of them came back."

There was no arguing that. Ger flowed back into the shape of a log. "What, then?" he asked.

"Let me think," Pid said.

Another creature lurched past, on four legs instead of two. Pid recognized it as a Dog, a pet of Man. He watched it carefully. The Dog ambled to the gate, head down, in no particular hurry. It walked through, unchallenged, and lay down in the grass.

"Hmm," Pid said. They watched. One of the Men walked past and touched the Dog on the head. The Dog stuck out its tongue and rolled over on its side.

"I can do that," Ger said excitedly. He started to flow into the shape of a Dog.

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"No, wait," Pid said. "We'll spend the rest of the day thinking it over. This is too important to rush into."

Ger subsided sulkily.

"Come on, let's move back," Pid said. He and Ger started into the woods. Then he remembered Ilg. "Ilg?" he called softly.

There was no answer.

"Ilg!"

"What? Oh yes," an oak tree said, and melted into a bush. "Sorry. What were you saying?"

"We're moving back," Pid said. "Were you, by any chance, Thinking?"

"Oh no," Ilg assured him. "Just resting."

Pid let it go at that. There was too much else to worry about.

They discussed it for the rest of the day, hidden in the deepest part of the woods. The only alternatives seemed to be Man or Dog. A Tree couldn't walk past the gates, since that was not in the nature of trees. Nor could anything else, and escape notice.

Going as a Man seemed too risky. They decided that Ger would sally out in the morning as a Dog.

"Now get some sleep," Pid said.

Obediently his two crewmen flattened out, going immediately Shapeless. But Pid had a more difficult time.

Everything looked too easy. Why wasn't the atomic installation better guarded? Certainly the Men must have learnt something from the expeditions they had captured in the past. Or had they killed them without asking any questions? You couldn't tell what an alien would do.

Was that open gate a trap?

Wearily he flowed into a comfortable position on the lumpy ground. Then he pulled himself together hastily.

He had gone Shapeless!

Comfort had nothing to do with duty, he reminded himself, and firmly took a Pilot's Shape. But Pilot's Shape wasn't constructed for sleeping on damp, bumpy ground. Pid spent a restless night, thinking of ships, and wishing he were flying one.

Pid awoke in the morning tired and ill-tempered. He nudged Ger. "Let's get this over," he said.

Ger flowed gaily to his feet.

"Come on, Ilg," Pid said angrily, looking around. "Wake up."

There was no reply.

"Ilg!" he called. Still there was no reply.

"Help me look for him," Pid said to Ger. "He must be around here somewhere."

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Together they tested every bush, tree, log, and shrub in the vicinity. But none of them was Ilg. Pid began to feel a cold panic run through him. What could have happened to the Radioman?

"Perhaps he decided to go through the gate on his own," Ger suggested.

Pid considered the possibility. It seemed unlikely. Ilg had never shown much initiative. He had always been content to follow orders.

They waited. But midday came, and there was still no sign of Ilg.

"We can't wait any longer," Pid said, and they started through the woods. Pid wondered if Ilg *had* tried to get through the gates on his own. Those quiet types often concealed a foolhardy streak. But there was nothing to show that Ilg had been successful. He would have to assume that the Radioman was dead, or captured by the Men.

That left two of them to activate a Displacer. And still he didn't know what had happened to the other expeditions . . .

At the edge of the woods, Ger turned himself into a facsimile of a Dog. Pid inspected him carefully.

"A little less tail," he said. Ger shortened his tail.

"More ears." Ger lengthened his ears.

"Now even them up." He inspected the finished product. As far as he could tell, Ger was perfect, from the tip of his tail to his wet black nose.

"Good luck," Pid said.

"Thanks." Cautiously Ger moved out of the woods, walking in the lurching style of Dogs and Men. At the gate the guard called to him. Pid held his breath.

Ger walked past the Man, ignoring him. The Man started to walk over, and Ger broke into a run.

Pid shaped a pair of strong legs for himself, ready to dash if Ger was caught. But the guard turned back to his gate. Ger stopped running immediately, and strolled quietly towards the main gate.

Pid dissolved his legs with a sigh of relief.

But the main door was closed! Pid hoped the Radioman wouldn't try to open it. That was *not* in the nature of Dogs.

Another Dog came running towards Ger. Ger backed away from him. The Dog approached and sniffed. Ger sniffed back. Then both of them ran round the building.

That was clever, Pid thought. There was bound to be a door in the rear. He glanced up at the afternoon sun. As soon as the Displacer was activated, the Glom armies would begin to pour

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through. By the time the Men recovered from the shock, a million or more Glom troops would be here. With more following.

The day passed slowly, and nothing happened. Nervously Pid watched the front of the plant. It shouldn't be taking so long, if Ger were successful.

Late into the night he waited. Men walked in and out of the installation, and Dogs barked round the gates. But Ger did not appear. Ger had failed. Ilg was gone. Only he was left. And *still* he didn't know what had happened.

By morning, Pid was in despair. He knew that the twenty-first Glom expedition to this planet was near the point of complete failure. Now it was all up to him.

He decided to sally out boldly in the shape of a Man. It was the only possibility left.

He saw that workers were arriving in great numbers, rushing through the gates. Pid wondered if he should try to mingle with them, or wait until there was less commotion. He decided to take advantage of the apparent confusion, and started to shape himself into a Man.

A Dog walked past the woods where he was hiding.

"Hullo," the Dog said. It was Ger!

"What happened?" Pid asked, with a sigh of relief. "Why were you so long? Couldn't you get in?"

"I don't know," Ger said, wagging his tail. "I didn't try."

Pid was speechless.

"I went Hunting," Ger said complacently. "This form is ideal for Hunting, you know. I went out by the rear gate with another Dog."

"But the expedition—your duty—"

"I changed my mind," Ger told him. "You know, Pilot, I never wanted to be a Detector."

"But you were *born* a Detector!"

"That's true," Ger said. "But it doesn't help. I always wanted to be a Hunter."

Pid shook his entire body in annoyance. "You can't," he said, very slowly, as one would explain to a Glomling. "The Hunter Shape is forbidden to you."

"Not here it isn't," Ger said, still wagging his tail.

"Let's have no more of this!" Pid said angrily. "Get into that installation and set up your Displacer. I'll try to overlook this heresy."

"I won't," Ger said. "I don't want the Glom here. They'd ruin it for the rest of us."

"He's right," an oak tree said.

"Ilg!" Pid gasped. "Where are you?"

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Branches stirred. "I'm right here," Ilg said. "I've been Thinking."

"But—your Caste—"

"Pilot," Ger said sadly, "why don't you wake up? Most of the people on Glom are miserable. Only custom makes us take the Caste-Shape of our ancestors."

"Pilot," Ilg said, "all Glom are born Shapeless!"

"And being born Shapeless, all Glom should have Freedom of Shape," Ger said.

"Exactly," Ilg said. "But he'll never understand. Now excuse me. I want to Think." And the oak tree was silent.

Pid laughed humourlessly. "The Men will kill you off," he said. "Just as they killed off the rest of the expeditions."

"No one from Glom has been killed," Ger told him. "The other expeditions are right here."

"Alive?"

"Certainly. The Men don't even know we exist. That Dog I was Hunting with is a Glom from the nineteenth expedition. There are hundreds of us here, Pilot. We like it."

Pid tried to absorb it all. He had always known that the lower castes were lax in Caste-consciousness. But this—why, this was preposterous!

This planet's secret menace was—freedom!

"Join us, Pilot," Ger said. "We've got a paradise here. Do you know how many species there are on this planet? An uncountable number! There's a shape to suit every need!"

Pid shook his head. There was no shape to suit *his* need. He was a Pilot. But Men were unaware of the presence of the Glom. Getting near the reactor would be simple!

"The Glom Supreme Council will take care of all of you," he snarled, and shaped himself into a Dog. "I'm going to set up the Displacer myself." He studied himself for a moment, bared his teeth at Ger, and loped towards the gate.

The Men at the gate didn't even look at him. He slipped through the main door of the building behind a man, and loped down a corridor. The Displacer in his body-pouch pulsed and tugged, leading him towards the reactor room.

He sprinted up a flight of stairs and down another corridor. There were footsteps round the bend, and Pid knew instinctively that Dogs were not allowed inside the building. He looked around desperately for a hiding-place, but the corridor was bare. However, there were several overhead lights in the ceiling.

Pid leapt, and glued himself to the ceiling. He shaped himself into a light fixture, and hoped that the Men wouldn't try to find out why he wasn't shining.

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Men passed, running. Pid changed himself into a facsimile of a Man, and hurried on. He had to get closer.

Another Man came down the corridor. He looked sharply at Pid, started to speak, and then sprinted away.

Pid didn't know what was wrong, but he broke into a full sprint. The Displacer in his body-pouch throbbed and pulsed, telling him he had almost reached the critical distance.

Suddenly a terrible doubt assailed his mind. *All the expeditions had deserted! Every single Glom!*

He slowed slightly. Freedom of Shape . . . that was a strange notion. A disturbing notion. And obviously a device of The Shapeless One, he told himself, and rushed on.

At the end of the corridor was a gigantic bolted door. Pid stared at it. Footsteps hammered down the corridor, and Men were shouting.

What was wrong? How had they detected him? Quickly he examined himself, and ran his fingers across his face.

He had forgotten to mould any features.

In despair he pulled at the door. He took the tiny Displacer out of his pouch, but the pulse-beat wasn't quite strong enough. He had to get closer to the reactor.

He studied the door. There was a tiny crack running under it. Pid went quickly shapeless and flowed under, barely squeezing the Displacer through.

Inside the room he found another bolt on the inside of the door. He jammed it into place, and looked around for something to prop against the door.

It was a tiny room. On one side was a lead door, leading towards the reactor. There was a small window on another side, and that was all.

Pid looked at the Displacer. The pulse-beat was right. Now at last he was close enough. Here the Displacer could work, drawing and altering the energy from the reactor. All he had to do was activate it.

But they had all deserted, every one of them.

Pid hesitated. *All Glom are born Shapeless.* That was true. Glom children were amorphous, until old enough to be instructed in the Caste-shape of their ancestors. But Freedom of Shape?

Pid considered the possibilities. To be able to take on any shape he wanted, without interference! On this paradise planet he could fulfil any ambition, become anything, do anything. Nor would he be lonely. There were other Glom here as well, enjoying the benefits of Freedom of Shape.

The Men were beginning to break down the door. Pid was still uncertain.

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What should he do? Freedom . . . But not for him, he thought bitterly. It was easy enough to be a Hunter or a Thinker. But he was a Pilot. Piloting was his life and love. How could he do that here?

Of course, the Men had spaceships. He could turn into a Man, find a ship . . .

Never. Easy enough to become a Tree or a Dog. He could never pass successfully as a Man.

The door was beginning to splinter from repeated blows.

Pid walked to the window to take a last look at the planet before activating the Displacer.

He looked—and almost collapsed from shock.

It was really true! He hadn't fully understood what Ger had meant when he said that there were species on this planet to satisfy every need. Every need! Even his! Here he could satisfy a longing of the Pilot Caste that went even deeper than Piloting.

He looked again, then smashed the Displacer to the floor. The door burst open, and in the same instant he flung himself through the window.

The Men raced to the window and stared out. But they were unable to understand what they saw.

There was only a great white bird out there, flapping awkwardly but with increasing strength, trying to overtake a flight of birds in the distance.

★ ★ ★

FACE VALUE

Picasso also met Stravinsky for the first time and painted his portrait.

Stravinsky nearly lost it on the journey back to France because the Customs officers refused to believe it was a portrait. Picasso at this period was painting portraits in a purely cubist style, and the work was broken down into geometrical shapes. The Customs officer insisted that it was a plan of military importance.

" But only the plan of my face," Stravinsky tried to explain.

But it was impossible to be convincing. He finally missed his train and was forced to send the portrait to Lord Berners at the British Embassy in Rome, who later dispatched it to Stravinsky in Paris by way of the diplomatic bag.

MARGARET CROSLAND,
Jean Cocteau

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THE PERFECT CRIMINAL

She was a cautious woman and a clever one

by EDMUND CRISPIN

"YOU chatter about the perfect crime," said Wakefield irritably, "but you seem incapable of realizing that it isn't a topic one can *argue* about at all. One can only pontificate, which is irrational and useless."

"Have some more port," said Haldane.

"Well, yes, I will . . .The perfect murder, for instance, isn't known to be a murder at all; it looks like natural death, and no suggestion of foul play ever enters anyone's mind. Only the *imperfect* murders are *known* to be murders. And consequently, to argue about the perfect murder is to argue about something which you cannot, by definition, prove to exist."

"Your logic," said Fen, "isn't exactly impeccable."

Wakefield gazed at him stonily. "What's wrong with my logic?" he demanded.

"Its major premiss is wrong. You've gone astray in defining the perfect murder."

"I have n—How have I gone astray?"

"The sort of thing you suggest—the apparently natural death—has one disadvantage from the murderer's point of view."

"And that is?" Wakefield leaned forward across the table. "That is?"

"At the risk of boring you all, I could illustrate it." Fen glanced at his host and his fellow guests, who nodded a vinously emphatic approval; only Wakefield, who hated losing the conversational initiative, showed any sign of restiveness. "What I have in mind is a murder which was committed several years before the war—the first criminal case, as it happens, with which I ever had anything to do."

"Quite a distinction for it," Wakefield muttered uncivilly.

"No doubt. And it was certainly the most daring and ingenious crime I've ever encountered."

"They all are," said Wakefield.

"It succeeded, did it?" Haldane interposed rather hurriedly. "That's to say, the criminal wasn't discovered or punished?"

"Discovered," said Fen, "but not punished."

"You mean there was no case against him?"

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" There was a cast-iron case; conclusive proof, followed by a circumstantial confession. But the police couldn't act on it."

" Oh well," said Wakefield disgustedly, " if all you mean is that he escaped to some country he couldn't be extradited from—"

Fen shook his head. " That isn't at all what I mean. The murderer is at the present moment living quite openly almost next door to New Scotland Yard."

There was a general stir of interest.

" I don't see how that's possible," Wakefield said sourly.

" And you never will," Haldane told him, " if you don't stop talking and give us a chance to hear about it. Go on, Gervase."

" The murder I mean," said Fen, " is the murder of Adam Pasmore, in 1936."

" Pasmore the composer? " someone asked.

" Yes."

" I remember it caused quite a commotion at the time," said Haldane thoughtfully. " And then it all seemed suddenly to fade out, and one heard no more about it."

Fen chuckled. " The authorities were overprecipitate," he explained, " and naturally they were anxious that their shortcomings shouldn't be advertised. Hence the conspiracy of silence . . .

" Pasmore and his wife were living at Amersham, in Bucks. He was forty-seven at the time of his death, and at the height of his reputation, though since then he's sunk almost completely into oblivion, and nowadays his stuff's hardly ever performed.

" His wife, Angela, was a good deal younger—twenty-six, to be exact. Attractive, intelligent, competent. As well as seeing to it that his house was kept like a new pin, she acted as his secretary. There was plenty of money—his, not hers. No children. Three servants. Superficially, it seemed quite a successful marriage, as marriages go.

" On the afternoon of October 2nd, 1936, two visitors came to tea. One was Sir Charles Frazer, the conductor, who lived only a few miles away. The other was a wholly unimportant young man called Beasley, who worked at an insurance office in the City. Both of them, it appears, were to some extent infatuated with Angela Pasmore.

" Sir Charles was there by invitation; Beasley just ' dropped in,' and neither of them was pleased to find the other there, since at tea-time, if she were at home at all, you could be sure of having Angela to yourself. Her husband always worked from two to six in the afternoon and had his tea alone in the study upstairs.

" At four o'clock, tea was served in the downstairs drawing-room to Angela, to Sir Charles, and to Beasley. Then, five minutes

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later, the afternoon post arrived. It was taken from the postman at the front door by Soames, the manservant, who carried it straight to the drawing-room and gave it to Angela. It consisted of a card for Soames, several letters and cards for Angela, and a single typewritten envelope for Pasmore. This last Angela immediately opened. She glanced through the letter inside and then handed it, with a slight grimace, to Sir Charles."

"And why," Wakefield inquired, "did she do that?"

"The letter," Fen continued unperturbed, "was from another conductor—Paul Brice, to be specific. He was in Edinburgh—where, as was afterwards proved, this letter had been posted on the previous afternoon—and there, at the Usher Hall in two days' time, he was scheduled to conduct a concert whose programme included Pasmore's symphonic poem, *Merlin*. *Merlin* was at this date quite a new work. It had had only one performance so far, under Sir Charles Frazer at the Queen's Hall. And since the score was tolerably complicated, Brice wanted advice from the composer on a good many points of interpretation.

"That was what his letter was about. I've seen it, and it consisted of a long list of things like: *At 3 after C, can I relax tempo in the bar and a half before the B entry?* and: *At 5 before Q, string accompaniment and clarinet solo are both marked p, but clarinet doesn't come through; pp accompaniment would blur harmonic texture; can clarinet play mf?* and: *At 7 after Y, do you want the più mosso as in the exposition?* There were, I think, at least two dozen such queries. Conductors aren't normally so conscientious, but Brice and Pasmore were lifelong friends, and Brice took Pasmore's music rather more seriously than its actual merits warranted.

"You will understand now"—and Fen eyed Wakefield with a certain severity—"why Angela should show this letter to Sir Charles. Having conducted the first and only performance of the work in question, he might be expected to be interested. He read the letter attentively, commenting—uncharitably, one gathers—on Brice's artistic perceptivity. Then he gave it back to Angela.

"She in turn handed it to Soames, who was still hovering in the background, and told him to take it up to her husband with his tea, which by immutable custom was served to him at 4.15. This he did, testifying subsequently that at 4.15 Pasmore was alive, uninjured, and in every way normal.

"At 4.20 Angela excused herself to her two visitors and left the drawing-room—in order, as she asserted later, to powder her nose. Beasley and Sir Charles remained together, making mistrustful small talk until, at half past four, she returned. She then stayed with them up to a quarter to five, when—as she'd

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previously warned them—she was engaged to drive her cook, Mrs. May, to the Chesham Cottage Hospital to visit her son, who had recently smashed himself to bits in a motor-cycle accident.

"Beasley and Sir Charles weren't much pleased at being superseded by this work of mercy, but there was nothing they could do about it, so, with Angela, they left the drawing-room and went out into the hall. Here she asked them to wait while she went up to her bedroom, whose door was clearly visible at the head of the stairs. And I'd better emphasize at this point, to save futile racking of brains, that both men saw her go straight into this room, and that both were prepared to swear she couldn't have entered any other room upstairs, let alone the study, without their knowing."

"There being, of course"—Haldane picked up his glass and stared pensively at it before drinking—"no means of communication between the bedroom and the study?"

"None whatever; care was taken to establish that. Moreover, Angela wasn't, according to Sir Charles and Beasley, in the bedroom for more than a minute at most. Emerging from it, she ran straight downstairs, went to the clothes-closet in the hall, disappeared into it for a few seconds, departed to the kitchen to fetch Mrs. May, returned with her immediately, took a coat from the clothes-closet and put it on, and finally shepherded Mrs. May and Sir Charles and Beasley to the front door.

"Outside, she said good-bye to the two men and got into the car with Mrs. May. And from then on, she was with Mrs. May continuously, in the car or at the hospital, until at least twenty minutes after her husband's body was found.

"All of which boils down to this: that if Pasmore was killed by his wife, she could only have done it between 4.20 and 4.30, when she was away from the drawing-room.

"It was Soames who found the body, when at six o'clock—again in accordance with immutable custom—he took whisky and water up to the study for Pasmore's pre-prandial drink. There proved, on investigation, to be nothing in the immediate circumstances of the crime that could help the police.

"Pasmore had been stabbed in the back while sitting at his desk, and had died instantaneously. The weapon was an eighteenth-century Venetian stiletto which normally hung over the study mantelpiece. There had been very little bleeding. The room had not been disturbed, and nothing, so far as could be discovered, was missing. There were no fingerprints on the weapon, and none in the room except such as were to be expected: the servants', Angela's, the dead man's.

"The police doctor arrived on the scene too late to be able to state the time of death with any certainty: 'probably between

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four and five ' was the most he could say. A cake had been eaten and a cup of tea drunk, Pasmore's prints being on the cup; and he had been killed, according to the post-mortem findings, between five and fifteen minutes after consuming these things. But since there was no evidence as to when he had consumed them—whether immediately after being brought the tea-tray, or later—that didn't help either.

" In short, the police had uncommonly little to work on. All the same, within three days Angela was under arrest.

" Only a very brief investigation had been needed to reveal the fact that the marriage was not as successful as it appeared on the surface; that, not to be long-winded about it, Pasmore's ménage was on the rocks.

" For some reason which I never clearly understood, Pasmore and his wife had recently quarrelled—a violent, fundamental quarrel of the sort that can never really be made up.

" And the first result of that was that Pasmore took steps to make a new will leaving the whole of his considerable fortune away from her—this, of course, was before the Inheritance Act came into force in 1938.

" His solicitors, thanks to some error, sent a draft of the new will to his home for his approval, and Angela saw it. So she had, obviously, a very substantial motive for killing him before the will could be signed and become operative. There was opportunity too—those ten minutes during which she had been absent from the drawing-room. Questioned about whether she'd entered her husband's study during that time, she denied doing so. And that was fatal, since it happened that both Soames and a maidservant had seen her do so . . .

" Mind you, all the evidence against her was circumstantial; there wasn't, nor apparently could there be, any conclusive proof of guilt. But circumstantial evidence is quite commonly hanging evidence, and the police were perfectly justified in making the arrest.

" In due course a charge was preferred by the Director of Public Prosecutions, and Angela, reserving her defence, was committed for trial at the Assizes.

" She pleaded Not Guilty, admitting, in the witness-box, that she *had* entered Pasmore's study, but stating that she left him alive and well—' writing a letter; I don't think he'd started his tea '—after a couple of minutes' casual conversation about household matters. The Prosecution's case being on the thin side, the Defence had reasonable hopes of an acquittal; and but for Angela's own behaviour in the witness-box, they would have been

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fairly confident of it. Unfortunately, however, she blustered and contradicted herself and told transparent lies and in general made a very poor impression.

"What would have happened if the trial had run normally at the end, one doesn't know. And the question's academic, since it didn't run normally at the end. At almost the last possible moment, when the judge was on the point of starting his summing-up, the Defence quite unexpectedly applied to admit new evidence which conclusively established the prisoner's innocence. The judge allowed the evidence to be given and, as a result of it, summed up in the prisoner's favour. The jury brought in a verdict of Not Guilty, and Angela Pasmore was acquitted of her husband's murder.

"You'll have guessed that the 'new evidence' had to do with Brice's letter. What actually happened, during the final day of the trial, was this: Angela remembered something which, she said, had been completely driven out of her mind by her husband's death, by the investigation, and by her own arrest—namely, the existence of a reply by Pasmore to that letter from Brice which had arrived by the afternoon post.

"It was Pasmore's habit to put letters that he wanted posted on the dressing-table in her bedroom—the servants, by the way, corroborated this. And on going up to her bedroom, just prior to leaving the house with Mrs. May, she had found this reply there, had put it in an envelope and addressed it, and had taken it downstairs in her pocket, transferring it at once to the pocket of her outdoor coat, which was hanging in the clothes-closet in the hall.

"Thereafter (I continue to quote her own account of the matter) she not only forgot to post it—as one does occasionally forget to post letters, important ones particularly—but also forgot, in the eventual confusion and distress, that the thing had ever existed. And presumably it was still in the pocket of her coat.

"All this Angela communicated to her counsel. And he, naturally, wasn't slow to see the importance of it. *If* Brice's letter had not reached Pasmore till 4.15, as it probably hadn't; *if* he had written a reply to it; *if* that reply had taken him more than fifteen minutes to write, as it probably had—then Angela could not have murdered him, since the only opportunity she had had was between 4.20 and 4.30.

"Someone was sent off post-haste to Amersham. The letter was found. Handwriting experts were unanimous in agreeing that Pasmore had written it—that no part of it was forged. Tests established the fact that the absolute minimum time required to write it must have been twenty minutes.

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" As to its content, that was a *seriatim* answer to Brice's queries, such as Pasmore could have produced only with the details of those queries in front of him.

" The arrival of Brice's letter by the afternoon post was sworn to, beyond the possibility of contradiction, by the postman, by Soames, by Beasley, and by Sir Charles. And Brice was emphatic that by no conceivable means could Pasmore have become acquainted with the questions about *Merlin* prior to the arrival of the letter.

" You'll see what all this evidence added up to: Pasmore couldn't have been killed before twenty-five to five at the earliest; and therefore it was not Angela who killed him."

Finishing his port, Fen lit a cigarette and leaned back more comfortably in his chair.

" As for myself," he went on after a moment's consideration, " I had no personal contact with the affair until after the trial was over. I read about it more or less attentively in the papers, and that was all. But about a week after Angela's acquittal I was dining with the Chief Constable of Buckinghamshire, and he, knowing I had a lay interest in criminology, showed me the dossier of the case. Most of it was just a repetition and expansion of what I already knew.

" There was also, however, a complete typewritten copy of Pasmore's letter to Brice. And something in the last paragraph of that letter struck me as being ever so slightly odd . . .

" The bulk of the thing, as I've told you, was simply a point-by-point reply, impersonal and businesslike in tone, to Brice's queries. The final paragraph, though, ran like this: *Forgive me if I don't write more. I'm in the middle of scoring Ariadne, with a concert on my next-door neighbour's wireless—lacrimae rerum!—to help me along, and am anxious, as you know, to get it done as quickly as possible. Good luck to the performance—I am sorry I can't be there. Yours—*

" Well, the police had checked this business of the concert at the time Pasmore's letter was produced in Court; and Pasmore's neighbour's radio had, in fact, been on between 3.30 and 4.45. So far, so good. But ' *lacrimae rerum* '—somehow that particular tag was wrong in that particular context. One's neighbour's radio is often tiresome, no doubt. But one doesn't use, as a comment on it, a phrase intended to express the profound, essential melancholy of all human activities—and more, of existence itself; the nuisance is too trivial and localized. And it occurred to me, as a consequence of this disparity, that ' *lacrimae rerum* ' might carry some specialized meaning for Brice and Pasmore—might in effect be a sort of private joke.

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"Luckily, Brice was conducting at Oxford three or four days later, and I was able to make contact with him and to ask him about it. My notion turned out to be right. Brice and Pasmore had been at school together, and had been close friends there, united in a passionately earnest devotion to music—a devotion whose naïvety occasionally bordered on the ludicrous. And on one occasion, when they had been listening together to Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony, Pasmore had remarked, in solemn, awestruck tones: '*Lacrimae rerum*, Paul; it sums up the whole tragedy of humankind.'

"Brice had been much amused by this pretentious gloss on the music, and thereafter '*lacrimae rerum*' had often been used between them as a means of referring to that particular work.

"So, naturally, I went away and hunted through back numbers of the *Radio Times* until I found the programme of the concert which had been broadcast on the afternoon of Pasmore's murder. It consisted of two works, the Walton Symphony followed by the Tchaikovsky Sixth; and there was no difficulty in calculating that the Tchaikovsky must have begun at about a quarter past four and gone on until the end of the concert at a quarter to five. All quite straightforward, you see; no discrepancy with the suggestion that Pasmore's reply to Brice had been written more or less immediately after receiving Brice's letter at 4.15.

"There I might have left it, but for the chance that I was lecturing in Amersham a week or so later, and, having an hour or so to spare, decided to go and interview Pasmore's neighbour—the one with the radio. He turned out to be a pleasant little man—something to do with the Home Office, I fancy—and naturally enough, he still remembered quite clearly the events of the crucial afternoon. He'd had that concert on all right, from beginning to end, but beyond that, there didn't seem to be anything of value he could tell me. And I was on the point of leaving, in a welter of civilities, before he quite unexpectedly let the cat out of the bag.

"'Of course, the police questioned me about it,' he said, 'and even though that wasn't till several weeks afterwards, I had no difficulty in recalling the concert—partly, no doubt, because of the change in the advertised programme.'

"I must have looked as though I'd seen a ghost. 'Change?' I echoed.

"'Why yes. For some mysterious reason of their own, they played the Tchaikovsky first and the Walton second.'

"And they had. I checked with the BBC, and it was true. Owing to some kind of mismanagement, the orchestral parts of the Walton hadn't been in the studio at the start of the concert, and the Tchaikovsky had had to be played while they were

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searched for. Therefore, the Tchaikovsky—'*lacrimae rerum*'—had *finished* at four o'clock; and therefore, if the reference in the final paragraph meant anything at all, Pasmore's letter to Brice had been completed by four o'clock."

Fen chuckled suddenly. "And, given that, it didn't really require much thinking to deduce how Angela's alibi had been contrived. The police, as I discovered, had worked it all out for themselves—but not, unfortunately, until after the acquittal."

Fen paused, and Haldane shook his head. "I'm afraid that for my own part—"

"Oh, come! Brice's letter had been posted in Edinburgh on the previous afternoon. It arrived at Amersham, of course, by the *morning* post on the day of the murder. Angela opened it—I've mentioned, I think, that she acted as Pasmore's secretary—and saw in it her opportunity. She destroyed the envelope in which it arrived, made a note of Brice's queries, typed a fresh envelope, inserted the letter, stamped it, and *posted it again*. She could thus be fairly sure of its arriving a second time, in the presence of the invited and infatuated Sir Charles, by the afternoon post.

"And in the meantime she went to her husband and said something like this: 'Brice rang up from Edinburgh while you were out. He's written you a letter about *Merlin*, but it struck him that it might possibly not arrive soon enough for your reply to reach him in time for the final rehearsal. I've made a note of his queries, and if you write off to him some time this afternoon, that should be all right.'

"Pasmore would believe this—why shouldn't he?—and the reply to Brice would be written. And all that Angela had to do after that was to destroy the notes she'd made of Brice's queries and the envelope, typed by herself and with a local postmark on it, in which Brice's letter arrived at the house for the second time. Between 4.20 and 4.30, of course, she entered Pasmore's study and killed him."

There was a brief, astonished silence.

Then: "Brilliant!" Haldane exclaimed. "Really brilliant . . . Only"—his enthusiasm waned slightly—"there are a lot of things which *could* have gone wrong. Pasmore might just have omitted to write the reply; or it might not have been long enough—though I suppose that in view of the number of queries he had to answer it was bound to be fairly long; or it might have contained some very definite reference to the hour of day at which it was being written. Or Sir Charles mightn't have turned up; or the letter—life being what it is—mightn't have arrived by the afternoon post: or—"

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" Yes, yes, I know all that," said Fen. " But you must realize that all those possible accidents and possible flaws in the scheme have one thing in common: if they were going to happen at all, they would happen *before the murder*. So if anything had gone wrong, Pasmore would quite simply not have been killed—not on that day, and in that particular way. Angela, I can assure you, is a cautious woman as well as a clever one."

" Is," said someone sombrely; and again there was silence.

" I suppose she missed the point of ' *lacrimae rerum*,' " said Haldane at last. " Interpreted it, that's to say, as just a general comment on neighbours' radios . . . She'd read the letter, of course, before killing Pasmore."

Fen nodded. " Certainly she would. It's to be presumed that Pasmore put it in her bedroom about four o'clock, and that she read it there, at twenty past four, before going to the study and killing him . . . I don't know why I say ' presumed.' By Angela's own admission that's what in fact happened.

" I wrote to her, you see, and by return of post she sent me congratulations on my perspicuity and a circumstantial account of the crime. It's a queer document—unique, of course: no trace of vanity or megalomania, and yet it makes me shiver every time I look at it."

" She got Pasmore's money, then? "

" Oh yes. And has lived very comfortably on it ever since."

" But look here," said Wakefield with sudden energy, " you can't possibly maintain that she arranged for Pasmore's letter to be her alibi and then *forgot* about it."

" Of course she didn't forget. She only pretended to—that was the whole point of her scheme. We're back where we started, you see; this is where the business of the perfect crime comes in. Your murder which looks like natural death—well, it's satisfactory up to a point; but the murderer can never be *quite* sure that one day, perhaps years after, some accident may not reveal the truth and send him to the gallows. His only road to absolute immunity from punishment is to be tried and acquitted, for it's a basic principle of English Common Law that *nemo debet bis vexari*—that no one may be tried a second time for the same offence.

" Angela *wanted* to be tried, in order that she might be acquitted and live afterwards in perpetual immunity. Hence Pasmore's letter was ' forgotten ' until the right moment for its use arrived. Angela took a great deal of risk, of course. But it worked out very nicely for her in the end."

" Well, I consider it's abominable," said Haldane with disgust.

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"When one thinks that nothing—*nothing*—can be done to punish the woman . . ."

"There are those"—Fen spoke very mildly—"who would maintain that such injustices are invariably rectified at a higher court."

"Ah." Wakefield sat up abruptly. "And why do they maintain that? They maintain it because they believe the Universe to be subject to Laws, and they believe that because the phenomenal flux, without the concept of Order, is psychologically intolerable. Aldous Huxley—"

"Have some more port," said Haldane.

★ ★ ★

MAGIC CASEMENT

There were notable characters among the Masters with whom I never had the good fortune to make contacts. Prominent among them was Arthur Christopher Benson, last in the Admirable Crichton race, but at one time a favourite for the succession to Warre as Headmaster. This big, untidy, benign man, minor poet and essayist, was renowned for his story-telling. Instead of "Sunday Private," that dreary Sunday morning hour when Lowry used to puzzle his Lower boys with Early Fathers, Origens, and Polycarps, but never explained, at any rate to Jones minor, how early or whose fathers, Benson, it was said, enthralled his House with *The Luck of the Vails* . . . He, too, must have been a civilizer; his House loved him, and I should like to have been up to him in that Division Room which had carved over the door: "Somebody must be last, but nobody need be."

All the same, I must have met him casually—was it at one of those rare dinner-parties to which senior boys were sometimes invited?—for I still remember the slow, sighing speech in which he told us of his pasty-faced friend who refused to open his window at nights.

Moths came in, explained the friend, and cockroaches and things; he could not abide insects in his room.

"But not in London," said Benson: "you are going to London for six weeks; open your window there, it will become a habit, and you will lose your pasty face."

The friend agreed, he went to London and opened his window, and "he hadn't been in bed an hour (a big sigh) before in flew (sigh) an enormous puffin."

Useless to explain that escapes from the Zoo are very, very rare; the friend never opened his window again.

L. E. JONES, *A Victorian Boyhood*

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BACHELOR GAY

Bachelor's fare: bread and cheese and kisses
Eighteenth-Century proverb

The bachelor most joyfully
In pleasant plight doth pass his days;
Good fellowship and company
He doth maintain and keep always.
With damsels brave he may well go;
The married man cannot do so;
If he be merry and toy with any,
His wife will frown, and words give many,
Her yellow hose she straight will put on,
So that the married man dare not displease his wife Joan.
Author Unknown

Escape

With Robert's complacent whine, with Edith's angry squawk, still in his ears, he knew that he could never face it. It was over. No more Sheila.

At the thought of finality his mind was flooded with images: the ivory bald patches behind her ears, the quivering of her pointed chin as she had raised her face to be kissed for the first time, her delicate wrists . . . his heart lurched over and over in his breast like a cricket ball lobbed along a dry, bumpy pitch; a shudder seized him, so violent that he was flung off his balance and lurched against the stone wall of a prosperous man's garden. The rough solidity of the stone flicked his mind empty again, and a new set of images crowded in; he saw Sheila's face, pale, luminous, resolute, and behind her the meanly precise face of her father, the tame and lumpy face of her mother, Edith's spiteful plucked eyebrows, and presiding over the scene, Robert, with his detestable calf's head and waving plump hands.

"I can't marry Robert!" he said loudly in his agony. A middle-aged woman and a small boy, standing at a bus stop, spun round and stared into his face with insane curiosity as he passed. Charles broke into a gallop. He only wanted to get round the next corner and hide his back from their eyes, but as he ran he knew that he was running away from everything that, up to that moment, had been his life.

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It was over. "No more Sheila" and "SNUG" were written across each other on a yellow-lit pane. Half dead, he clutched at the brass door knob and swung himself over the threshold of the bar parlour.

JOHN WAIN, *Hurry on Down*

Second Thoughts

I watch'd her as she stoop'd to pluck
A wildflower in her hair to twine;
And wish'd that it had been my luck
To call her mine.

Anon I heard her rate with mad
Mad words her babe within its cot;
And felt particularly glad
That it had not.

C. S. CALVERLEY, *On the Brink*

Reservations

"'Reggie, are you going to make this marriage?"

"I do not know," said the boy, rather fretfully. "Do you want me to?"

"I never want anyone to do anything. And I should be delighted to continue not paying for your suppers. Besides, I am afraid that marriage might cause you to develop, and then I should lose you. Marriage is a sort of forcing-house. It brings strange sins to fruit, and sometimes strange renunciations. The renunciations of marriage are like white lilies—bloodless, impurely pure, as anaemic as the soul of a virgin, as cold as the face of a corpse. I should be afraid for you to marry, Reggie! So few people have sufficient strength to resist the preposterous claims of orthodoxy. They promise and vow three things—is it three things you promise and vow in matrimony, Reggie?—and they keep their promise. Nothing is so fatal to the personality as the keeping of promises, unless it be telling the truth. To lie finely is an art, to tell the truth is to act according to Nature, and Nature is the first of the Philistines. Nothing on earth is so absolutely middle-class as Nature . . . No, Reggie, do not marry unless you have the strength to be a bad husband."

"I have no intention of being a good one," Reggie said earnestly.

ROBERT HICHENS, *The Green Carnation*

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Caveat

Be not hasty to marry; it's better to have one Plough going than two Cradles; and more Profit to have a Barn filled, than a Bed.

THOMAS FULLER, 1608–61,
Introductio ad Prudentiam

Single-Minded

A young man who wished to marry consulted his uncle, an old courtier of the days of Edward P. " No one will want to marry you as you are," said his uncle. " You must get polish, your own particular aroma. Take a house, get to know about furniture and painting, buy the new books, listen to music, know whom to entertain and how to serve food and wine. Then you'll have something to offer, and all the right mothers will snap you up." The young man did as he was told and some fifteen years later called again on the ancient week-ender of Fort Belvedere, whose old eyes now were seldom far from tears or alcohol.

" My house is perfect," squeaked the brittle youth, " the pictures are just right, the bindings of green morocco catch the light of the evening sun; my *Louis Singe* commodes belly out in the alcoves, there are Malvern water and biscuits by every bed, and in each lavatory the toilet-paper, loosely arranged in scented sheets, is weighed down by a coloured stone. Nobody who dines with me gets quite drunk or goes home quite sober, nobody who comes to luncheon remembers afterwards anything they have said. I am at last perfectly eligible. What shall I do? "

The old Beau laughed, and lit his third cigar.

" Just carry on," he chuckled; " I think we've got you out of the wood."

PALINURUS,
The Unquiet Grave

Further Outlook . . .

Ye bachelors contented be
With what the future holds for you;
Pity the married man, for he
Has nothing to look forward to,—
Nothing to court with bated breath!—

(Nothing, that is to say, but Death!)

HARRY GRAHAM, *Adam*

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SWEETEST SINGER

**Faint and clear it came
a flute playing a little tune**

by JOHN INGLIS HALL

I HAD arranged with Kate and Alec Garnet, while they were staying in London on the way to the Midi, that when I followed them to Antibes, I would send a wire to Alphonse Cherigou's restaurant in the place de la Petite-Fanchette. They never knew where they would be staying because for years they had left the details of their lodging to Cherigou. He contrived to place them in a flower-grower's farm on the outskirts of the town.

So when I arrived by air at Nice a week later, I knew that Alec would be waiting for me at the aerodrome. Coming out of the brilliant sunshine of the airfield into the darker customs shed, I looked round for a moment, blinded. At last, I spotted him behind the barrier, in deep conversation with an old lady in a green dress. They were either old friends, or had discovered some absorbing common interest, because for a time he appeared to have forgotten the whole object of his being there. He even pretended not to notice me until I had passed the barrier and was coming up to greet him.

Alec Garnet is a fascinating character. Ever since I first knew him, when we were both schoolboys, there has been attached to him some quality that gives me intense pleasure every time I meet him, even after quite a short separation. I think his curiosity about apparently insignificant people and happenings is one of the things that make him so immensely endearing.

When he saw me, he disentangled himself quickly but charmingly from the old lady, took me by the arm, and began talking to me at once, as though we had parted only a few minutes ago in the middle of a conversation.

"Jeff, get out your notebook," he cried. "I've a story for you already. We should all of us live in the Mediterranean basin—you, particularly. The place sweats stories—though this is probably only the beginning of one. I'll tell it to you when we get back to Kate at Cherigou's."

Kate is Alec's wife, half Spanish and half Irish, and a perfect foil for his oddities. She underlines them with sustained, admiring mockery.

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"Alec, you are as brown as an Arab already," I said, shaking hands with him. We drove off in a hired car to Antibes, talking very little on the way. Alec likes to look out of the windows at what is going on. Just as at home, when he drives me from the station to his farm, he assumes I shall want to look at the trees and the animals in the fields in order to slow myself down to his country tempo, so he let me absorb without interruption the brilliant colours, the sun, and the scents of the Midi.

We left the car at the covered market and between us carried my luggage to the place de la Petite-Fanchette.

The place de la Petite-Fanchette lies off the covered market of Antibes. It is a little paved square into which cars cannot enter. You reach it by a narrow alley called the passage Jouffe, and when you are ten yards from the street, the sounds of the traffic and the market fade, muted by the walls of the houses, which are white or terra-cotta, peeled and faded. Women talk to one another quietly across the street from window to window.

The doyen of the place de la Petite-Fanchette is Alphonse Cherigou. It is he who decks it in season with small, round orange trees in green tubs; who welcomes newcomers as they enter, like a landed proprietor greeting guests at his château. He is immensely fat and generally wears a beret, a black-and-white ringed singlet, and blue jeans.

His restaurant is on the right-hand side of the place, and as we entered it, I caught sight of Kate sitting with her back to us at a table under the pale blue sun-blind with the device *Le Gai Cherigou* on it in dark blue letters.

Cherigou himself, who was sitting facing her, saw us first. He jumped to his feet, smiling. "Tiens, ce cher Monsieur Jeff!" he cried. "Mimi! A bottle, well iced!" And he ran out and led me over to the table by the arm.

Kate, radiant, in a red flowered dress, her jet-black hair shining, stood up and gave me her hand.

As I kissed her, I said, "Kate, you are surely the most edible woman in Antibes."

"I know," she said, nodding her head. "Isn't it splendid?"

Mimi, Cherigou's plump wife, as fat as he but with the weight somewhat differently distributed, bustled out from the back of the restaurant with a cool, perspiring bottle in her hand.

Alphonse took it from her. "There, mes enfants," he said, as he uncorked it, "vin rosé of Provence, bottled specially for you by Alphonse Cherigou—he flatters himself, perfectly."

It was delicious. We drank and talked. Then, after we had eaten our lunch, I said: "Well, Alec, what about this story—this beginning of yours?"

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Alec set down his pipe with a little decisive clink in a china ashtray in front of him. He is the true raconteur, who silences his audience by means of small tricks, like a conjurer or a magician.

"Ah yes," he said. "Alphonse believes we were not strictly sober when it happened. Mimi, who is more charitable, puts it down to witchcraft. We—" he shrugged his shoulders—"we only know that it happened; we were there . . ."

You know Alphonse has lodged us with some nice people who have a farm in the hills on the road to Biot? A double bed, a shower-bath in an outhouse, cicadas, cypresses, fifty bantam chickens, and a thousand rose trees. It's on rising ground, and from our window you can see the sea. On our second night, we were feeling mellow, due to Alphonse's vin rosé, and we decided to walk home—seven kilometres!

We started out after midnight, on a wonderful moonlit night, with a skyful of stars. The air was warm and still, with different scents every few hundred yards. The light of La Garoupe flashed every few minutes. You remember how one waits for it? We walked arm-in-arm, listening to the frogs and the cicadas, watching our shadows, moon-printed on the road. We were silent, happy to be back where we feel we belong.

At a point about halfway home, on a long hill by a turning, beside a big stone wall enclosing a garden full of cypresses, eucalyptus, and pines, we suddenly heard music. We stopped and listened. It was enchanting. Maybe we were already enchanted. Faint and clear, it came to us from a distance—a flute, playing a little tune.

"Gipsies," I said, but Kate told me not to be a fool. "It's the pipes of Pan," she said.

Then, as suddenly as it began, the music ceased. Perhaps twenty seconds passed. We waited, standing quite still. Then a woman's voice began to sing a song to the air which the flute had played—in a truly miraculous, small soprano.

Kate and I held hands, like two good children, and listened. For a time it continued alone, then there was a pause, and other women's voices joined in, in harmony. This went on for about five minutes, then all at once the singing stopped in mid-phrase. It was like a silver thread, suddenly cut by scissors.

(Alec suited the word with a gesture, snipping the air swiftly with invisible shears.)

By now, Kate and I were whispering, not talking—quite spellbound.

"Not gipsies or Pan-pipes," I said to her. "Radio from some farm or villa." Then I looked at my watch. It was past one in

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the morning, and there was no programme on the air. I told Kate. "A gramophone in somebody's house, then," she said.

We had both of us noticed that the language was neither French nor Italian. We did not recognize either the song or the tune. After waiting for a few minutes to see if it would begin again, we walked home.

"That's all. You see? It's just a little, delightful, mysterious incident—perfect, but of no importance . . ." Alec stopped speaking for a moment. "What do you make of it?" he asked.

I shrugged my shoulders. "Why, nothing!" I said. "It is delightful, as you say, but there is no story. It is just an incident. There were houses nearby, presumably?"

Alphonse Cherigou, who was sitting with us, nodded his head. "Yes, one," he said. "But it is a little strange that when this happened, there was nobody there. It was shut up. So the singing was probably gipsies."

"No," said Kate firmly. "I insist. The pipes of Pan. I'll settle for nothing less than the pipes of Pan—and perhaps a few dryads—yes, I think dryads."

"As you wish," Alec said. "Your father was a classical scholar, so I suppose you have a right to choose."

There the matter would certainly have rested, had it not been for the arrival in Antibes of Max Vergniaud. Max is a friend of Alec's whom I had met several times at their farm at White Aston in Gloucestershire. He inherited a vast cotton business from his father when a comparatively young man, and is so rich that when we meet him in France we insist that he shall come slumming with us at Alphonse Cherigou's. He has the delicacy to realize that we cannot afford his way of living, but we allow him a few concessions. He is permitted to give us one gargantuan lunch each holiday at whatever palace he is staying in.

Max arrived in Antibes after I had been there a week, and came straight to Cherigou's to find us. Alec had written to him in Lille, telling him that we were in the Midi, and he had flown down for the week-end.

He and his wife were staying at the Auberge des Preux Chevaliers, which stands white and low, above its own secluded amethyst bay, nearly at the end of the Cap.

He invited us to lunch the day after his arrival, and we drove there in a taxi. The balconies of the Preux Chevaliers almost overhang the water. In season, its white walls seem about to be overwhelmed by waves of bougainvillaea. A dark wood of pines stands behind it.

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From the landward side, the approach is by a red, dusty road among the trees; then you come to a narrow, wrought-iron gate, its main motif a knight in armour on horseback. A narrow path leads through a garden of huge cacti to the entrance of the hotel, which is flanked by two round flower-beds. They were full of red and orange cannas.

Max himself met us at the gate as we paid off our taxi. He was dressed in a white singlet and spotless white Arab trousers—the seroual—a relic from his military service in Morocco. He always declared that they were the coolest hot-weather dress in the world, but we recognized also that he wore them with a particular grace, being tall, dark, and broad-shouldered, with a very narrow waist.

In acknowledgment of this, Kate salaamed to him ironically, touching her forehead, her lips, and her midriff, as he greeted us. Then he kissed her hand and led her through the gate into the garden.

"You are lucky," he said, turning round to face us. "We've got a celebrity to meet you at lunch—old Conder Snape, the American archaeologist. He and my father worked together in the Châtelard Foundation—which they really created between them—excavating various classical sites in France and elsewhere. Don't worry, Kate! He is nearly eighty and immensely learned, but Conder is far from dull," he added, smiling at her.

"Have I suggested by word or gesture that he would be?" said Kate pertly.

"Touché!" said Max, and we resumed our walk through the garden.

As we approached the steps of the hotel, I remembered something about Conder Snape. "Didn't he dredge up the famous marble Demeter from the sea, off Corfu?" I asked.

"That's the one," replied Max.

I had seen his photograph in one of the illustrated papers some years before—a huge, ungainly, untidy giant of a man, with a mane of white hair and rimless glasses, standing beside the statue which the divers had just brought up from the sea-bed. He was a man with an immense reputation, not only as an archaeologist but also as a Greek scholar, and I told Alec about this.

He listened. "Good!" he said. "He will be an old brigand, like Max's father! This is going to be a fascinating luncheon."

Max overheard him, and called out over his shoulder: "Yes, Alec. An old brigand—you are perfectly right. But a distinguished man—also like my father!"

Max had a suite of three rooms with a broad balcony running

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the whole length of the suite, shaded by a blue-and-white striped awning. His blonde Swedish wife, Lina, met us at the french window of the sitting-room. She was wearing a white seroual, exactly like Max's, but topped by a peacock-blue blouse, crossed over her chest and tied round her waist.

She led us onto the balcony. Conder Snape was sprawled in a deck-chair, a glass of champagne in one hand, but he got up quickly as we entered.

" Conder, you old rascal, here are Kate and Alec Garnet, and Jeff Marsden," she said.

We shook hands with him in turn. The old man quizzed each one of us with sharp, shrewd, amused eyes, and seemed, by and large, to approve of us. Kate he led away at once and sat her down on the chair next to him. We began to drink champagne.

Conder Snape was as good a listener as he was a talker, and in the twenty minutes before lunch I admired the way he led the conversation, with wit and subtlety, without ever dominating it as he could so easily have done. It was very evident, however, that he had fallen for Kate. He watched her closely, probed her knowledge, tested her wit. Kate was at her most enchanting, and Conder Snape was a brilliant talker.

Lunch was served at the far end of the balcony, in a kind of round watch-tower built out over the sea. It was a fantastic affair, elaborate to the last degree, but exquisitely balanced and served with tremendous elegance. It began, I remember, with iced mangoes. As we ate them, we admired the great cone-shaped pièce montée of hors d'oeuvres, standing majestically in the centre of the round table. Festoons of prawns and crayfish encircled the base of the cone, and at the top a giant lobster protruded, head upwards, from a nest of green and red pimentos, holding a small, fantastic, blue-striped Mediterranean fish in either claw.

Every new dish and wine we greeted with hand-clapping. Conder Snape ate and drank enormously, and about halfway through lunch he began to talk to Kate about the history of Antibes—the Antipolis of the ancient world—and the book he was writing about the cult of Aphrodite which, he declared, flourished in the temples which once ringed the town in the hills. Gradually, all other conversation died, and we began to listen only to him.

At around four o'clock, we had moved back to the balcony for coffee and brandy, still on the same subject. By then, Conder was dealing with the more pornographic aspects of the Greek cult. In a momentary lull in his monologue, Kate suddenly let

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slip, quite casually and without thinking, our story of the flute and the singing.

When she began to speak, at first Conder just looked at her, smiling, then suddenly he put his glass down on the table in front of him, straightening his back as he did so. Seizing her chair with both hands, he pulled it round with her in it, until she was facing him, and spoke to us all, a note of command in his voice: "Silence, everyone, please!" he said.

Kate stopped short, taken aback, but soon recovered herself. We sat perfectly still. It was a complete change of mood, as though a cool wind had blown in from the sea.

"Kate Garnet," said Conder Snape, "I am vastly interested in what you have just said. I wonder would you mind repeating it from the beginning?"

Kate went over the whole thing again, rather more slowly, with a shade more wonder in her voice. Somehow, it sounded a more miraculous happening than the first time. When she had finished, there was a moment's silence, at the end of which Conder Snape stood up, glass in hand. He was breathing heavily, like a man excited or deeply moved.

"There were times," he said, "when the Greeks of the ancient world poured libations to the gods—as I do now."

He tipped the brandy in his glass onto the floor beside him, with a quick, flipping gesture of the hand. Moved by a sudden common impulse, we all stood up and solemnly did the same. It was like a ritual, ceremonial act, and curiously exciting.

A moment later, Max spoke. "Well, Conder," he said, "what is it? Tell us more!"

"Whether there will be any more to tell depends on Kate and Alec Garnet," said Conder. "I am inviting them to stay with me, as my guests, for the remainder of their holiday. And you too, Jeff—to record what happens, to see fair play."

He turned to us, holding out both his hands, palms upwards, in an oddly emphatic gesture of appeal. "I beg of you to come," he said. "I need you. And the fantastic thing is, the whole world may need you too. It may also be your great chance of fame—if fame interests you."

"Why," said Max, slowly and thoughtfully, "but why?"

Then something dawned on him. "*Your* house!" he exclaimed, raising a hand suddenly, eagerly, like a schoolboy who has found the right answer in class.

Conder Snape nodded. "That's it! All this happened near my house! And there was nobody there. For some reason, my housekeeper won't sleep in it alone, and I was in Paris . . ."

Max's party ended almost at once. Conder Snape saw to it.

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Without ceremony, he herded the three of us out of the room, like precious prize cattle, dropping apologies to Max and Lina as we left. He would not let them come with us.

Outside, his car was waiting under the pine trees, the chauffeur asleep in his seat, overcome by the afternoon sun. Conder Snape woke him up, and in a few minutes we were driving slowly through the streets of Antibes, then on to the road to Biot.

None of us spoke. I was perfectly clear-headed, in spite of the wine I had drunk. Old Snape sat between Alec and Kate, silent, occasionally shaking his head. I sat in front, watching him in the mirror. Once, he turned and patted Kate's hand.

We reached the garden and took the steep right hand turn up the drive beside the high wall which Kate had described. At the top of the hill to the right was a gate, flanked on either side by two Ionic columns. The car stopped and we got out.

"This is the place, isn't it?" said Conder Snape. He looked at Kate and Alec and they nodded their heads. "These two columns at the gate were part of a shrine to Aphrodite which was in the little valley at the back of the house," he continued. "Come in and I'll show you the exact spot where it stood."

We stepped into the garden and stood for a moment under the trees, listening to the cicadas, then Conder Snape led us to the site of the temple. He described to us vividly what it had looked like in its heyday, though there remained of it only small fragments of stone. It was for me, instantly and strangely, what I can only call a holy place.

Then, out of the corner of my eye, I saw Alec take Kate by the arm. She was suddenly very pale. Conder noticed this and took us back to the house. When we reached it, he sat us down on chairs in the patio at the back, overlooking the site of the temple, and left us for a moment.

When he returned, he was accompanied by an old woman dressed in black, carrying a bottle, glasses, and a blue, glazed earthenware jug of water, on a tray. For a while we sat and sipped pastis. Conder's assurance had left him: he was visibly apprehensive.

At last, he said, looking at each of us in turn: "You will stay with me? Is that settled? I don't need to persuade you? Good!" He sighed with relief. "Alec—you, Jeff, and I shall take the car and fetch all your things. In the meantime, Kate, will you listen to me? I can't explain right now why I want you to do this, but when we leave, I'd like you to take pen and paper and write down your thoughts—the first that come into your mind."

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Kate had recovered her composure somewhat, but there remained a faintly hysterical undertone in her voice as she protested that she was inarticulate on paper, and had been ever since she wrote bad poetry at school.

Conder Snape placed a hand on her arm. "It doesn't matter," he said. "Write, all the same. You may find it easier than you think . . ."

We left her sitting, rather forlorn, on the little patio, with a pile of white paper and a fountain pen in front of her on a rough, solid wooden table which Conder Snape himself fetched from the kitchen. Alec and I turned and waved to her from among the trees by the gate as we left, and she made a small, helpless gesture, raising her shoulders and arms, then letting them fall, limply.

Conder Snape deliberately spun out the journey to fetch our luggage. He stopped the car frequently to point out sites and probable sites of temples and old buildings which he said had been constructed out of Greek or Graeco-Roman remains. We both knew, inwardly, that it was useless to ask questions about the mystery of what Conder expected Kate to write, and why. He had a long, tedious conversation with Kate and Alec's former hosts, accompanied by several glasses of pastis, and when finally we left, the sun was setting.

We drove slowly back to Conder's villa in the miraculous, clear, pink glow which precedes by an hour the Mediterranean summer twilight. The sky was pale blue, shading to rose-pink on the horizon, with the first, faint stars overhead when we reached the house.

Conder Snape entered the garden almost at a run, ahead of us, muttering to himself, but we were close on his heels. We found Kate, still sitting at her table, and she turned to us as we approached. She looked exhausted, bewildered, but triumphant.

The old man bent down without a word and seized two sheets of paper which lay in front of her. As he read them, his hand shook. Then, still without speaking, he passed them to Alec, and we looked at them together.

Immortal Aphrodite of the star-embroidered throne, daughter of God, guileful weaver, I pray to you, Queen of Heaven, not to break my spirit with distress and anguish of the heart. Come to me, if ever in the past from afar you heard my voice crying and listened, leaving your father's house in yoked chariot, drawn by fair, swift sparrows, flapping their wings over the dark earth, coming from Heaven down the sky. Quickly you came to me, blessed one. Smiling with immortal calm, you asked what now ails me, why I call you, what in my mad heart I desire. "Who

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would you that I summon to love you, Sappho? Who wrongs you? If she flies from you, she shall soon follow. If she rejects you, she shall soon yield. If she does not love you, she shall love you, and soon, in spite of herself." Come once again, therefore, I pray you, release me from love's torments, O Queen, and grant me, with yourself as my ally, my heart's desire.

I had read only a few lines when I recognized them. "Sappho's Hymn to Aphrodite!" I cried. "Kate! You knew it before! You must have! Her only complete poem. The rest were destroyed some time under the Byzantine Emperors—part of the suppression of paganism. Except for it and part of the Ode to Anactoria, only a few lines of her poetry survive."

Conder Snape seized my arm and gripped it. "Right!" he cried, and his voice shook with excitement. "Well, Kate? Quick, woman, your answer! Did you know it before—either in Greek or English?"

Kate shook her head. "No," she said decisively. "I have never read Sappho. I hadn't an idea what I was writing! I only know that while I wrote, I was more excited, physically and mentally, than I ever felt in my life."

"I can't believe it!" I said.

"Wait," said Conder Snape. "Perhaps you will when you have heard the rest of the story."

He sat down at the table opposite to Kate and immediately began to talk, looking from one to another of us as he did so.

"Did you ever come unawares upon a treasure, lost for centuries?" he asked. "One of the greatest losses mankind has ever sustained? Twenty years ago, I believe I did. It was within my grasp. I'll tell you about it, because it explains this . . ." and he held up Kate's papers in his hand.

"Twenty years ago, the daughter of my housekeeper—the one who served our pastis—worked here with her. At that time I was excavating the temple behind the house. The girl was pretty enough, but a strange, moody creature. She had moments of mad gaiety when she sang and danced all over the house.

"On those days, her smiling days, she sometimes asked me, in her twanging meridional voice: 'Did you hear it last night, monsieur? The singing? Ah, it was wonderful! For nearly an hour, I heard the singing.'

"At first, I asked her questions about it, but it was no use. She just thought I was deaf—a dull old man who could not hear singing."

Here Conder Snape stopped and waited, as though he expected us to grasp what, to him, was the clear thread of a story he already knew.

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Then he went on: " I thought her a mad girl—an adolescent who heard voices. I thought, if there really had been singing, I would have heard it, because I sleep badly.

" Then, one morning, I found her in the kitchen at her table, I thought writing a love-letter, because she covered it with her hands when I came in. I kidded her for a few minutes, asking the name of her lover.

" At last, she said suddenly: ' But no, Monsieur le Professeur, I have no lover. I am writing poetry.'

" She showed it to me. It was a little poem of extraordinary simplicity and beauty—and it contained, to my utter astonishment, lines that I and every Greek scholar know:

Like the sweet apple red
Far at the end of the bough,
At the end of the bough hanging
That the gatherers forgot.
Forgot? No!. They could not reach it! "

The old man paused. " Now, do you understand? Kate? Alec? Jeff? "

" The thing is," he continued, without waiting for us to reply, " among the girl's poetry, I found seven other poems—exquisite, miraculous things—all containing surviving lines from the lost poems of Sappho . . . I began to work on them, translating them back into the Greek, into the Aeolic in which Sappho wrote." He fell silent again.

At last Alec said: " What happened to the girl, Conder? Where is she? "

Conder Snape sighed. " She cycled to Antibes one morning for provisions—to the Saturday market. It was only a month after she showed me her poems. On the way back, a lorry knocked her down and she was killed. So the treasure, just found, was lost again—until this afternoon, at lunch, when I heard Kate's story, and had the sudden, crazy inspiration: could the singing be the key to some door into the past, signifying to whom the word is revealed? I made you come back with me, and we have put it to the test. I think, without any possibility of doubt, that it is! "

He picked up the sheets of paper from the table, and waved them slowly and triumphantly above his head . . .

During our stay, Kate and Alec heard the singing four or five times, sometimes in the day, but more often late at night. Always it was when they were capturing on paper what was the most perfect.

When I returned to London, it was to me that Conder Snape

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entrusted the first fifteen pieces of the new Sappho, for safe delivery to his English publisher.

At the same time, he told me that I could write this story down, if I thought it was of any interest.

Considering the fate of van Meegeren and his Vermeers, I approach the whole subject with considerable trepidation.

★ ★ ★

GRAMPAHOOD

People live forever in Jacksonville and St. Petersburg and Tampa,
But you don't have to live forever to become a grampa.
Your entrance requirements for grampahood are comparatively mild;
You only have to live until your child has a child.

From that point on you start looking both ways over your shoulder,
Because sometimes you feel thirty years younger and sometimes thirty years older.
Now you begin to realize who it was that reached the height of imbecility;
It was whoever said that grandparents have all the fun and none of the responsibility.
This is the most enticing spider web of a tarradiddle ever spun,
Because everybody would love to have a baby around who was no responsibility and lots of fun,
But I can think of no one but a mooncalf or a gaby
Who would trust its own child to raise a baby,
So you have to personally superintend your grandchild from diapers to pants and from bottle to spoon,
Because you know that your own child hasn't sense enough to come in out of a typhoon.

You don't have to live forever to become a grampa, but if you do want to live forever,
Don't try to be clever;
If you wish to reach the end of the trail with an uncut throat,
Don't go around saying Quote I don't mind being a grampa but I hate being married to a granma Unquote.

OGDEN NASH,
Come on in, the Senility is Fine

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MAN ALONE

"I came to get him," Wilson said

by RICHARD FERBER

IT was midday when he left the sloping trail and turned the pony into the valley. The dust lay thick on his clothes, on the jeans and the faded canvas coat and the black Stetson. He was tall and large-boned, with a leanness about his face, and eyes that were set deeper than they should have been.

His hair was sandy, and the thinness of it showed when he pushed the hat back from his forehead. He could feel the heat then, and he reined in the pony and sat looking at the broad grassland of the valley.

From where he sat he could make out the cabin, or what was left of it. It stood beyond the grove of cottonwoods, and there were only a few charred logs now, and no sign of the fence. For a moment his curiosity drew him towards it, and yet he knew there was no reason to go any closer.

He could remember it well enough. It had been eight years ago, but he could still smell the smoke in the air and he could still see the guns flashing in the darkness.

He took out tobacco and paper and began to roll a cigarette. His fingers were long and graceful, and he worked quickly. He finished the cigarette and put it in his mouth without lighting it. Then his glance swung back to the cabin.

There had been no moon that night, he remembered. The riders had come out of the cottonwoods, and they had been only dim, shapeless figures against the darkness of the sky. There had been a dozen of them, and he had heard their voices and the sound of the ponies as they ran over the hard ground. But there was no telling where that one bullet had come from.

It was a stray shot, and he'd heard it pass his shoulder, and behind him the woman had made a little coughing sound, and at first he hadn't understood. It was only when they set the roof on fire that he called to her . . . . It was time to leave, he said; they couldn't fight any more, and they had the child to think about . . . And she didn't answer. He could see her lying on the floor, and the kid was standing over her, not saying anything, just watching her curiously, and waiting for her to get up. But she never did. The bullet had pierced her heart, and she had died

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soundlessly. And there was no one to blame for it, no one but the twelve men outside.

They stopped firing when he dragged her away from the burning cabin, and when they told him to get out again, their voices were more gentle than they had been before. He supposed they were sorry . . . they hadn't meant to kill a woman . . . but then it was too late.

He had shot two of them the next morning in the Colbyville street, and then he had got out as they had told him. Only he had left the kid behind. He was only four, and he couldn't take a four-year-old boy with him after that.

He pulled himself straight up in the saddle now and scratched a match against the metal of the holstered Colt. He lit the cigarette and, for a moment longer, he watched the cabin. Then he nudged the pony into a trot. When he passed the stand of cottonwoods he couldn't see the cabin any longer. The town of Colbyville lay a mile ahead of him, the sun glinting on the yellow railroad depot.

He thought about the boy as he rode. The boy would be twelve now, and it was hard to believe that he was going to see him again after those eight years, and after the five hundred miles he'd come, swallowing the desert's alkali and making the waterless camps. And he hadn't minded it. He was leaving something behind him, the loneliness of strange towns and noisy, bustling saloons, the cold loneliness of a hotel room.

All that would be different now; there would still be the same towns and the same hotels, but the boy would make it different. Eight years, he thought; he wondered why he hadn't come back sooner.

He worked the pony down to a walk again when he crossed the railway tracks and turned into the street. The plaza was almost empty. The dust hung in the air, and in the shade under the wooden canopies the flies buzzed in noisy, circling masses. Half a dozen ponies stood at the hitching-racks, and a few buckboards were parked against the pavement.

There was nobody on the bench in front of the hotel, but two men stood just outside the Northern Lights Saloon. He saw they were watching him. They didn't move until he had gone past, then they turned and went inside. A man came out of Teeler's Hardware and stood blinking at him as he pulled in to the rack.

He dismounted and let the reins drop over the railing and went up onto the pavement. The sign, *Marshal*, was still over the door of the office, but the paint was faded and there was only the impression of it now. Through the dusty windows he could see the old man asleep in the chair.

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He moved to the open door and stood leaning there, and a smile broke at the corners of his mouth.

" Hullo, Charley," he said.

Charley Dowd opened one eye and looked at him. He was an old man with a grey moustache and grey eyes. He had his spurs hooked on the edge of the battered mahogany desk, and his long body was sunk deep in the swivel chair. A fly rested on the tip of his angular nose and he brushed at it irritably. He shut his eyes and then opened them again and stood up.

" Lord, it's Wilson," he said. He came forward, offering his hand, his eyes carefully searching Wilson's face. " It's been eight years, Frank. Yuh ain't changed much," he said, smiling.

" You've got a good memory," Wilson told him.

The old man chuckled and motioned Wilson to a chair. He went back and sat down again and swung his legs over the desk.

" No, it ain't that, Frank," he said, laughing again. " I ain't got no better memory than the next man. It's just that they keep sendin' me these things." He straightened up and shoved a pile of circulars across the desk. Wilson took them.

" Heard yuh were in Texas for a while," Charley Dowd said. " San Saba."

" That's right," Wilson told him. The top circular had the words, *Wanted . . . in San Saba, Texas . . . Three Hundred Dollar Reward*, with his name printed above it. He dug down through the pile until he found another one. " They don't pay much, Charley," he said. " It's hardly worth your while."

The old man didn't answer for a moment. His eyes remained on Wilson, and he was still smiling. " I reckon I ain't thought too much about it, Frank," he said finally. " I wasn't figurin' to see yuh come back."

Wilson's eyes narrowed a little. " You knew I'd come back, Charley," he said. " You're not forgetting about the boy? "

Charley Dowd shook his head. " No, I reckon not. I reckon I was just hopin'."

Wilson slumped down in the chair and began to roll a cigarette. Outside, a horse ran along the street, and down at the other end of the plaza he could hear the ringing of a blacksmith's hammer. " Where is he, Charley? " he asked quietly.

The old man sat up, and his fingers worked at the pile of circulars. " Now listen, Frank—"

" Where is he? " Wilson said again.

Charley Dowd shook his head. " No, yuh listen to me first." He got up and moved slowly to the dusty window. He wore his hair long so that it touched the collar of his shirt, and his shoulders were bent a little with age.

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"It's been eight years, Frank," he said thoughtfully. "And eight years is a heap of time. A lot of things can happen; a lot of things can change. Take this town here now. Eight years ago I wouldn't have given yuh a dud three-cent piece for the whole works. But she's right peaceable now. Ain't no ranchers fightin' nesters, or no nesters fightin' ranchers. Ain't like it was when yuh were here at all. Why, I reckon we got as many grangers living in this valley as we have cattlemen."

"I've been in a lot of towns, Charley. I didn't come back to hear about this one."

"I'm only tryin' to tell yuh," the old man said irritably, "things have changed. I got to figurin' yuh weren't comin' back. So I found a home for the boy. A good home, much better than I could ever give him." He paused, and eyed Wilson meaningfully. "I couldn't be no use to him, Frank, no more than yuh could."

"He's my son," Wilson said. "I'm askin' you where he is."

Dowd turned to the window again. His hands were jammed deep in his pockets. "Yuh ain't got the right to ask," he said angrily. "Yuh ain't got no right even comin' back here. After eight years . . ."

"Where is he?" Wilson repeated. He wasn't going to argue with the old man. There was more than one reason why he hadn't come back sooner. He had spent two years in the penitentiary at Helena, and when he'd left San Saba he had to keep going west because they knew his name to the east.

"Yuh always were a mule," Charley Dowd was saying in a loud voice. "A no-good, stubborn . . ."

Wilson stood up. "I'll find out, Charley," he said.

The old man looked up from the desk. "He's out at the Howards' place. The Lazy H," he said. "Been out there for over seven years. And they're fine people, Frank. They been mighty good to that boy. Just like his own folks."

He stopped because he could see the change on Wilson's face. He came round the desk slowly and stood facing the younger man. "I know what yuh're thinkin'," he went on. "But things have changed. Yuh gotta see that, Frank."

"Does he know?" Wilson asked.

The old man shook his head. "He was too young then, Frank. He don't remember anything."

"I remember," Wilson said.

It had been dark that night, but they had set the cabin on fire, and when he took the woman outside he'd been able to read the brands on the ponies' rumps. They were Lazy H ponies, and he'd killed two Lazy H riders the next day.

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"Yuh ain't holdin' that against him, are yuh, Frank?" Charley Dowd was saying. "That was a long time ago, and there ain't nobody more sorry about it than Jack Howard. Yuh couldn't blame him for fightin' for what he figures was his."

"I don't know," Wilson said. He'd thought of killing Jack Howard once, but now he had come back to Colbyville, not expecting to see him, not expecting to have the chance.

"Yuh're goin' out there?" the old man asked. "Yuh're gonna take the kid?"

"He's my son," Wilson said. "I'm gonna try."

"All right," Charley Dowd said. He took Wilson's hand. "Frank, yuh and me been friends for a long time. I been tryin' to tell yuh, and I ain't gonna try any more. I ain't too sure myself. I just hope yuh're doin' the right thing, 'cause I'll be on the other side if yuh ain't. Remember that, Frank."

"Thanks." Wilson turned and moved towards the door. "I forgot to ask you, Charley," he said. "About those circulars . . ."

The old man looked at them thoughtfully. His glance came back to Wilson, and he smiled thinly. "Yuh don't have to worry, Frank. I figure yuh'll be gone in a few days. And I ain't aimin' to bother yuh none."

"You'd be a fool to try," Wilson told him.

The smile faded from Dowd's face. "I reckon yuh're right," he said quietly. "But if I thought I had to, I'd still try."

"I know it," Wilson said.

The headquarters of the Lazy H ranch lay a half-mile off the wagon road. When Wilson turned into the yard, there was no one in sight, and he reined in and sat for a moment, waiting.

He heard the rattle of a harness, and turned and saw the man come out of the stable. He vaguely remembered the man. Jack Howard was tall and broad-shouldered, and there was still a youthful vigour in his step. He had a soft, good-natured mouth, and when he saw Wilson, there was no suspicion in his eyes.

"'Light, stranger," he said, "if you've a mind to."

Wilson stepped down from the saddle and let the reins drop to the ground.

"You're a stranger in these parts," Howard said matter-of-factly, and extended a hand.

Wilson ignored it. "I'm Frank Wilson," he said.

Howard's eyes dropped for a moment. He looked at the harness he was holding, and then his eyes came slowly up again. "I'm mighty glad to see you back, Mr. Wilson," he said, and Wilson could hear the strain in his voice.

"I came back to see the boy," he told him.

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Howard smiled weakly. "Why, sure," he said. "He's here. He'll be glad to see you. He'll—"

"I came to get him," Wilson said flatly.

For a moment Howard didn't answer. He looked at Wilson, and then he turned, and his glance went to the porch. "I guess I hadn't figured on that, Mr. Wilson." He looked at Wilson again, waiting for him to speak. "You see, it's been eight years, and we didn't figure you were coming back. So we tried to give him a good home and all. He's more like a son to us than anything else."

"I know all that," Wilson said impatiently.

"It would be pretty hard on us if you took him now, Mr. Wilson," the man went on. "Be pretty hard on the boy, too."

Wilson said nothing. His eyes drifted over the ranch yard. The corral was empty and only one saddle-pony stood at the hitch-rack in front of the house.

"It ain't like you just been gone for a little while," Howard was saying. "It's been eight years, and the boy don't know no other folks but us. He's got a good home here, and—" he paused, and his face reddened a little in embarrassment—"Oh, it ain't that you wouldn't give him a good home, too, Mr. Wilson."

They heard the screen door open, and Howard turned, and they saw the boy standing there. He watched them curiously. He was a tall kid, lanky like his father, but he had his mother's dark hair, and soft, gentle features. He wore blue denim overalls that came too high above his shoes, and there was a boy's gangling clumsiness about him.

Wilson kept looking at him, and his glance finally dropped away. He moved to the roof support, leaned against it, and stared at the grass beyond the yard. "Does he know about me?"

The man shook his head. "No, that's just it, Mr. Wilson. We ain't never told him. As far as he knows, Hannah and me, we're his ma and pa. We kind of figured it would be better that way."

Wilson had been watching the boy. It was hard to think of his son except as he remembered him—the child of eight years ago. It still wasn't too late.

He called to him: "Sammy, come here."

The kid looked at him, but he didn't move.

"Get his gear packed," Wilson said. "I'm takin' him with me."

Howard let go of the harness and it clanked to the ground. "No," he said. "No, you're not."

Wilson smiled. "You're going to stop me?"

"I'm gonna try."

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" You're a fool, Howard," Wilson said. " You haven't got a gun."

Howard turned towards the boy. " Get back in the house, Sammy," he called.

The boy hesitated. " Go on, Sammy," Howard yelled again. The boy opened the door reluctantly and went inside.

Wilson could see the woman standing behind him. He turned to Howard. " I won't tell you again," he said coldly. " You've got five minutes to make up your mind."

Howard shook his head. " No," he said. " No, you're not takin' him."

" All right," Wilson said. He started to go past him and the man grabbed him by the arm.

" You got to listen to me, Mr. Wilson," the man said.

Wilson hit him.

The blow sent him backwards. He landed on one shoulder and got up slowly. Wilson hit him twice on the side of the head and he could feel the pain shudder along his arm. Howard slammed into him, but he swung himself clear and drove a hand to the softness of the man's belly. Howard grunted and his body began to sag. He groped for Wilson blindly and then sank to his knees.

He stayed there for a second, his head moving slowly from side to side in a daze. " You ain't gonna take him, Mr. Wilson," he said.

Wilson waited for him to get up. He could see the kid standing on the other side of the screen door, and the woman behind him. When he hit Howard again, he heard her scream. Howard's legs buckled, and he twisted, and sat down.

" You ain't gonna do it," he said hoarsely, almost whispering. And he tried to get up.

Wilson stepped round him. Howard turned and fell on his side, and he could only get up as far as his elbow then.

" Mr. Wilson," he called quickly.

Wilson went up the steps; the screen door opened. The woman was standing there, and he couldn't see the boy now.

The woman's hair was grey, and she wore glasses, and she was holding a Winchester carbine in her hands. It was pointed towards him, and as he watched her she drew back the hammer.

" Get out of the way," Wilson said softly.

" No," the woman said. " You heard what he told you. You're not taking the boy."

He was angry now. He stood with his hands at his sides and he could feel them shaking and he could feel the weight of the Colt against his hip. " Get out of the way," he said again.

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The woman didn't speak. Her eyes held him, steady and unblinking, and he could see that it was no use. He backed away and went down the steps.

Jack Howard was still sitting in the dust of the yard.

"I'll be back," Wilson told him. "Tomorrow, or the next day, or the day after that. I hope you have a gun by then, Howard, because you're sure going to need one."

Charley Dowd was standing on the pavement as he came into the Colbyville street. Wilson went past him without nodding and then stepped into the hotel.

The clerk nodded sullenly. "You want a room, mister?" he asked stiffly.

"For the night," Wilson said.

The clerk shrugged. "That'll be two dollars, then."

Wilson laid two silver dollars on the counter. He signed the register and turned it back to the man. He could see the clerk's lips moving as he read the name.

The man glanced up suddenly and his mouth opened. "You're Frank Wilson?" he said.

"That's right," Wilson said. He took the key and turned away from the desk.

"It's No. 8, Mr. Wilson," the clerk said hastily. "No. 8. Just turn right at the head of the stairs."

But the number was on the key, and he only heard the clerk vaguely. He could already feel the loneliness of the hotel, and when he turned down the hall, his boots echoed hollowly on the bare flooring. He unlocked the door and went inside and stood for a moment in the darkness.

He went to the iron bed and lay down there. The bed creaked noisily, but when it stopped he could hear the sounds of the street. The sounds were lonely; his mind went back to the other rooms, in the other hotels, and not even the loneliness was different. It had been losing the woman at first, but he'd got over that, in a way.

He had moved fast enough, so there was little time to think, except for the times in some dirty hotel room like this. Then he would lie on a creaking bed and listen to the sounds coming up from the street, and that aloneness would catch up with him again. Until it became unbearable and he would go downstairs, as he would now, and there would be the noise of the saloon and the warm comfort of whisky.

He swung his legs over the edge of the bed and stood up. He would have to do it only once more now, he thought. Tomorrow he would leave Colbyville, and he would take the kid. He didn't

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know how it would be to have a son again, but he knew he could forget the loneliness.

He went downstairs, and the clerk's manner had changed now. The man nodded to him politely. Wilson went out, pausing for a moment, then moved towards the swaying batwings of the Northern Lights Saloon. It was past midnight before he climbed the stairs to the room again.

The next morning, when Wilson came down from the hotel, he found the saloon almost empty. The barkeeper was reading a newspaper at the far end of the counter.

He eyed Wilson drowsily. "Whisky or beer?" he said.

"Whisky," Wilson told him.

The barkeeper put up a bottle and glass. Wilson paid him, took the bottle, and sat down at a table away from the door. There was a clock on the far wall of the saloon. It was just eleven o'clock, and he could hear a church bell tolling from somewhere in the town. Wilson poured a drink and for a while watched the flies tapping at the front windows.

It was a half-hour later when he saw Charley Dowd push his way through the batwings. Wilson turned in his chair, nodding to him, and the old man came over and sat down. "Hot," he said, tilting his hat back and draping one leg across the table.

"Get another glass, Charley," Wilson told him.

"No, too early," Charley Dowd said, and took a cigar from his waistcoat pocket.

Wilson turned the glass of whisky between his fingers. "You were looking for me, Charley?" he asked.

"Nope," Charley Dowd said. "Not special, anyway. Just came in for some shade." He yawned and brought a hand up to his mouth, and something about the way he did it made Wilson suddenly alert. The old man was casual, he thought—perhaps too casual. He sat up in the chair and watched him more closely.

Charley Dowd had his watch out and was looking at it disinterestedly. "Sunday's sure a slow day," he said.

"I saw the boy," Wilson said. "I figured you knew, or you'd be asking."

"Why, no, I didn't," Charley Dowd said, gazing at him frankly. "I was thinking it was none of my business."

Wilson tipped up the drink and watched Dowd over the top of the glass. He set it down again and said deliberately, "You were making it your business yesterday, Charley."

Charley Dowd ignored the tone. "I didn't see the boy with yuh, so I figured yuh changed your mind."

"I didn't, Charley," Wilson told him, but the old man seemed content to let it go. He had the watch out again and was studying

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it thoughtfully. He sighed and slipped it back into his pocket. A train whistle blew faintly in the distance.

"Sure is hot," Charley Dowd said. "And it's worse when yuh got nothin' to do. Just sittin' and waitin'. It's different when yuh're workin'." He stopped, his glance moving to Wilson. "Yuh ever think of goin' back to farming, Frank?"

"I'm through with that," Wilson said. He wasn't paying much attention now.

"I reckon it's a hard life," Charley Dowd went on.

Wilson looked at him. A hard life, he thought. Yes, it had been hard enough, though he hadn't minded it. Once it had meant something to him, and he could still remember the long days in the field, and the evenings, cooler, when he'd sit behind the back lean-to and watch the acres of ploughed land stretching away from him. One hundred and sixty acres of it, and a man could live on it if he worked hard enough.

Only it took more than that. It took a gun, and even then it hadn't mattered. He thought of the woman, the way she had looked that night with the boy standing over her, and his hand tightened on the whisky glass. Charley Dowd had his watch out and once more was studying it.

"There's a clock on the wall," Wilson told him.

"This one tells a mite better time," Charley Dowd said.

"You expecting somebody?"

"No." The old man pushed the hat forward on his head. Still holding the watch, he said, "Bought this timepiece in Abilene, ten years ago. Cost me thirty dollars, near as I can remember. I was trailin' beef for Jeb Carver then . . ."

The doors creaked open and a man came into the saloon and up to the bar.

Wilson only half listened. From the depot he could hear the sound of escaping steam, and the train whistle blew shrilly again.

"I just been down to the depot," the man said. "I see Jack Howard's takin' himself a little trip."

"Yeah?" The bar-tender answered indifferently.

"Takin' that boy with him, too. Reckon he's goin' to St. Louis. Mighty fine town, St. Louis . . ."

For a moment Wilson didn't grasp the words. Then the train whistle blew again, and he came to his feet, the chair toppling away from him. He saw the clock on the back wall—almost twelve—and he started round the table.

"Hold it, Frank," the old man yelled. "Hold it!" And Wilson stopped.

Charley Dowd had put the watch down. The gun was held firmly in his hand.

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" I'll kill you, Charley," Wilson said. " I'll kill you for this."

Charley Dowd smiled. " That ain't no way to act, Frank. Why, yuh and me, we was just having a little talk. Like old times."

" I'll kill you," Wilson repeated.

The smile left the old man's face. " All right," he said, " but yuh still ain't goin' down to that station. Not now, leastways. And by the time yuh get there, Frank, it's gonna be too late for anything."

Wilson didn't answer. He heard the train whistle again, and he moved forward so that his leg came against the edge of the table.

" Don't try anything," Charley Dowd said quickly. " I'm tellin' yuh, Frank, don't try . . ."

The table caught him in the stomach, knocking the breath out of him. He grunted and went backwards out of the chair. There was the sound of breaking glass, and Wilson heard the gun clatter to the floor. The old man rolled over and tried to reach for the weapon.

" Don't," Wilson said, and his boot sent it skidding across the planking.

The old man looked up at him. " Yuh said yuh were gonna kill me, Frank. And I reckon yuh're still gonna have to. That's a long street, and I'll come after yuh. Yuh'll have to kill me before yuh get to the end of it."

Wilson hesitated. " All right, Charley," he said. He turned and ran towards the door.

" I'll come after yuh," the old man called, and Wilson let the batwings swing shut behind him.

He hurried along the street. A man came out of the hotel and he shoved him roughly aside. Far down the street he could see the train beyond the yellow siding of the depot. Then suddenly the old man was running behind him.

" Frank," he called. " Listen to me, Frank."

Wilson didn't answer. He left the pavement and ran along through the dust of the plaza. The old man was following him.

" Frank! " Charley Dowd yelled. " Listen, Frank . . ."

He could see the train moving. A buggy turned into the street, and the horses nickered and wheeled away from him. He was almost at the end of the street now.

The old man shouted again: " Frank. Listen to me. You don't want it in the back. Turn round, Frank . . ."

Wilson stopped. His hand went to the Colt, and he twisted back and fired. The gun fell from Charley Dowd's grasp. He buckled sideways and dropped to one knee, and for a moment

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stayed that way. Then he crumpled and rolled on his back. A man ran out and bent quickly over him.

Wilson jammed the Colt back in the holster and turned down the street. He could see the train moving faster now, the cars sliding past the depot. He started to run again, and he knew it was too late. He swung round the corner of the building and he could only see the rear van then, drawing slowly away from him. There was no horse in sight. A brakeman stood at the end door, waving. The train picked up speed, and Wilson watched it until only smoke from the engine was visible in the distance.

The anger left him. He could feel the sudden, liquid weakness of his knees. He turned, starting to go back, and saw Jack Howard standing at the other corner of the station.

Howard came slowly towards him. There was a gun on his hip now, but it was pulled up too high and it seemed to hinder him as he walked. He stopped in front of Wilson and tried to smile.

"You should have taken that train yourself," Wilson said coldly. He watched the paleness come to the man's face. "'Cause I'm gonna kill you, Howard. You've got a gun, and I'm gonna kill you."

Howard tried to smile again. "I know it," he said.

"You should have been on that train," Wilson repeated.

"Would it have done any good?" Howard asked.

"No," Wilson said. "I'd just have come after you." He backed a few feet away. Howard's eyes were steady. Wilson waited for them to change. "I won't kill a man who won't draw," he said.

"I'll draw, Mr. Wilson," Howard said quietly.

Wilson hesitated. He was waiting for something, perhaps for his anger to come back, or perhaps for the man's hand to move towards his gun. He could kill him easily enough then. He thought of Charley Dowd lying back in the street. He could shoot him as easily as he had shot Charley Dowd.

And he knew suddenly that he never would. The boy was gone, and it didn't really matter. He'd lost the boy eight years ago, when the woman had died and he had gone into the street with a gun. Nothing could bring him back now. He was a stranger to the kid, and this man was a friend. And nothing could change that.

All he could do was to kill this man, and then there would be only another grave for the kid to wonder about. He let his hand fall slowly away from the Colt and to his side.

"You're a brave man, Howard," he said.

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Jack Howard didn't answer. His lips were trembling now and he was afraid to speak. His gaze went past Wilson's shoulder and seemed to fasten there.

Wilson turned abruptly. The old man was leaning against a corner of the building just a few feet away. He smiled at Wilson. There was a red blotch on his side, and the shirt was torn away, so that Wilson could see the red gash of the wound. He had his hand pressed above it, and in the other hand he had the gun.

Wilson let his breath out and a smile worked at the corners of his mouth. "You could have killed me then, Charley, if you'd wanted to," he said.

The old man nodded. "I reckon yuh could have killed me back there in the street, too," he answered. "Yuh always were a good shot, Frank."

Wilson turned, and his glance went to Howard for a moment. Then he looked back at the old man. "It was close, wasn't it, Charley?" he said.

"It was close," Charley repeated.

Wilson smiled, then moved round the corner of the building and started up the plaza.

"I knew yuh weren't gonna do it, Frank," he heard the old man calling after him.

"Sure," Wilson said. But he didn't turn. His horse was in the livery stable at the other end of the street.

★ ★ ★

HANDICRAFT

I hate the gents who'll take a bottle,
A length of wire, and on the spot'll
Transform them to a lamp that works—
The jerks.

I cannot bear the grown-up boys
Who fashion highly welcome toys
Entirely out of inner tubes—
The boobs.

My admiration goes all out
To family heads who, full of doubt,
Assay these feats and, failing, flee—
Like me.

DICK EMMONS,
Give Me the Unhandy Type Every Time

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IDYLL

Worship, ye that lovers be, this May!
For of your bliss the calends are begun

JAMES I OF SCOTLAND, *The Kingis Quair*

Sweet is the snow in summer for the thirsty to drink, and sweet for sailors after winter to see the garland of spring; but most sweet when one cloak shelters two lovers, and the tale of love is told by both.

ASCLEPIADES, *Second Century B.C.*

Love Song

Oh and in the tiny trickle of the bird's noise
I shall hear you.
Oh and in the hushing gossip of the windy trees
I shall breathe you.
Oh and in the bricking of the sun on the wall
I shall feel you.
Oh and as one beauty of my complex Beauty
I shall miss you.

As we were young and shedding shifts
Of age as they clammied us down and about,
As we were sung and singing our golden gifts
Of height and youth and youngness in and out,

As we were free, we became unto unfreedom
With a snapping of us-strings for chains in their place.
As you were beautiful, you vanished into beautydom,
As you were graceful, you became a part of grace.

Now the chankle of chains is no part of my selfing
But your beauty in me is a pride of my Proud
As we skiff through a scape with our fingers wealthing
The grass in this world where only clouds are loud.

TERRY HAWKES

Kisses and Laughter

A moment later he heard the voice of Nadia, who had come up in silence to bring him the drink he wanted. At the sight of him sitting there angrily thrashing at the water she suddenly burst out laughing as loudly as when he had told her that the major had thought the stars were like fish.

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He began laughing too, and took the drink from her hands. She was kneeling by the bath. She had smoothed and oiled her hair so that it was like a black and polished shell; there were fresh flowers in the side of it, a crimson one and a tasselled spray of milky cream, and there was a smell of fresh tanaka powder deliciously about her face.

She kept laughing for a moment or two longer, her teeth white in the darkness, and then pressed her head against his water-sprinkled shoulder, half kissing him, half laughing with her mouth against his neck.

H. E. BATES, *The Jacaranda Tree*

Sweet Heart

Crimson flowers now grow black,
The tree-arched stream a pool of silver and coal,
Yet, in this indiscriminate light, every
Moth knows its shadowy door, blackbird, blackbird,
As I—from all this vast of time and place—
Turn to the glimmering heart-world of your face.

TOM BOGGS, *Of Love*

Lovers' Meeting

It happened that just as he walked forward, Dinah had paused and turned round to look back at the village: who does not pause and look back in mounting a hill? Adam was glad; for, with the fine instinct of a lover, he felt that it would be best for her to hear his voice before she saw him. He came within three paces of her and then said, " Dinah! " She started without looking round, as if she connected the sound with no place.

" Dinah! " Adam said again. He knew quite well what was in her mind. She was so accustomed to think of impressions as purely spiritual monitions, that she looked for no visible accompaniment of the voice.

But this second time she looked round. What a look of yearning love it was that the mild grey eyes turned on the strong dark-eyed man! She did not start again at the sight of him; she said nothing, but moved towards him so that his arm could clasp her round.

And so they walked on in silence, while the warm tears fell. Adam was content, and said nothing.

GEORGE ELIOT, *Adam Bede*

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Enchanted Wood

The sun is coming down to earth, and the fields and the waters shout to him golden shouts. He comes, and his heralds run before him, and touch the leaves of oak and planes and beeches lucid green, and the pine-stems redder gold; leaving brightest footprints upon thickly-weeded banks, where the foxglove's last upper bells incline, and bramble-shoots wander amid moist rich herbage. The plumes of the woodland are alight; and beyond them, over the open, 'tis a race with the long-thrown shadows; a race across the heaths and up the hills, till, at the farthest bourne of mounted eastern cloud, the heralds of the sun lay rosy fingers and rest . . .

For this is the home of enchantment. Here, secluded from vexed shores, the prince and princess of the island meet: here like darkling nightingales they sit, and into eyes and ears and hands pour endless ever-fresh treasures of their souls . . .

He calls her by her name, Lucy: and she, blushing at her great boldness, has called him by his, Richard. Those two names are the keynotes of the wonderful harmonies the angels sing aloft.

" Lucy! my beloved! "

" O Richard! "

Out in the world there, on the skirts of the woodland, a sheep-boy pipes to the meditative eve on a penny whistle.

GEORGE MEREDITH, 1828-1909,
The Ordeal of Richard Feverel

Summer's Queen

O! the month of May, the merry month of May,
So frolic, so gay, and so green, so green, so green!
O! and then did I unto my true Love say,
Sweet Peg, thou shalt be my Summer's Queen.

Now the nightingale, the pretty nightingale,
The sweetest singer in all the forest's choir,
Entreats thee, sweet Peggy, to hear thy true Love's tale:
Lo! yonder she sitteth, her breast against a briar.

O! the month of May, the merry month of May,
So frolic, so gay, and so green, so green, so green!
And then did I unto my true Love say,
Sweet Peg, thou shalt be my Summer's Queen.

THOMAS DEKKER, *c.* 1570–1632

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WASTE NOT, WANT NOT

Halliford grappled with the challenge —and slowly found the answer

by GRAHAM WOOD

TIBERIUS HALLIFORD started modestly. No decent millionaire would own to being much more than an errand-boy in his youth. The growth of Halliford's fortune was gradual and had innocent roots. As a young man, he had been bequeathed a tumbledown laundry by an uncle who died when its steam-boiler exploded.

Halliford, at that time a shipping-clerk, made the first vital decision of his life: he accepted the laundry and left shipping stranded. There followed years of hardship, of struggle, of rude letters from honest artisans whose clothes were lost at his laundry.

Through this period Halliford stumbled unhappily, laying the foundation of his fortune. The real turning-point in his career came one day in the late nineteen-twenties. A day, tiring and aggravating beyond reason, in which he dealt with two major problems: the reduction of the salaries he paid his employees, and a dreadful letter from a Mr. Joe Blubber. The problem of salaries was not too difficult: this was the era of industrial depression, when hunger ensured an unending supply of labour.

Mr. Blubber, on the other hand, had written:

Sir, I find it difficult to understand the personal vendetta you are pursuing so relentlessly against me and mine. I and mine have been good customers of your laundry for thirteen years, and once every six months you lose one of my shirts. How can you be so regular? What do you do with them? Yours irately,

Joe Blubber

Halliford, sunk in his leather swivel chair, brooded unhappily. He neither appreciated Blubber's succinct style, nor found consolation in the probability that Blubber was a professional correspondent: a man who addressed the Prime Minister, his M.P., county councillors, and the local vicar at frequent, dyspeptic intervals, and whose week was only made complete when, in the correspondence column of the local paper, his admonitions and inspirations appeared above the subscription, *Pro Bono Publico* or *Ratepayer* or even *Father of Twelve.*

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Halliford considered no such niceties: he forgot to demand how many collars (wing) had been bleached off-white that day. He chewed his finger-nails and gnawed the end of a pencil. At last, he wrote a rude, hurt reply to Blubber—too proud to admit he had no idea what became of the evanescent Blubber shirts.

Later, in the loneliness of his thought-filled house, he brooded. "What do you do with them?" Joe Blubber had demanded. After the first anger subsided, Halliford was intrigued by this question. What *could* he do with them? The torn, mutilated shirts, the ripped blankets, the desecrated underwear, the shrivelled blouses—the mountains of ruination inexorably growing out of the normal pursuit of laundering. Wasted mountains. Slag heaps of derelict clothing.

What could he do with them? As he fidgeted in his office, as the pedals of his aged bicycle squeaked home through the evening rush-hour, as he lay awake at night, Halliford grappled with the challenge—and slowly found the answer.

He started on a cautious scale, to give his idea a modest but thorough trial. He studied the employment records of his entire staff and found two who could be relied on to stay out of every lock-out, in every strike to lead the scabs. He interviewed them in his office behind a firmly closed door.

"Gin and Lime, I have faith in you. You understand the industrial system; you're men of integrity and, I hope, loyalty." They hastened to reassure him. "I want you to undertake a special task." He cleared his throat like a grandfather about to tell his grandchildren how much tobacco cost in 1902. "The world economic position is desperate. I'd like to pay my workers more, I don't want to sack anybody. But I can't see how to avoid reducing salaries and staff unless I make more. Gentlemen, I have found a possible solution. I want you to be my Salvage Officers."

"Salvage, your honour?" Lime queried. Lime was unsubtle, but willing, like the old offenders who call a magistrate "My Lord" in the hope that liberal flattery will reduce their sentences.

"Yes, salvage." The gleam in Halliford's eye brightened. "Every time we tear or burn or stain any clothing, I want it salvaged. Further, I want at least three tons of salvage a week. You'll have a clerk to help you list the lost items as you lose them. I've hired the disused chapel next door as a salvage dump."

Gin smiled with low cunning, tapped the side of his nose with a nicotine-stained finger, and winked. "I get you, guv. Three tons, at least."

"As Salvage Officers, you will have two main duties. To

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ensure three tons of salvage a week, and to grade the salvage into second-hand clothing and rags."

Lime nodded happily. He did not quite understand what he had to do, but sensed that here, at last, was something to appeal to his deeper instincts. Destruction.

The scheme worked well. Once a week, in the middle of the night, two large furniture vans were filled with the second-hand clothing and rags. Then, carrying the prospering Gin and Lime, they were driven on long journeys to Glasgow, Southend, or Swansea. After a day of hard bargaining with dealers, the Salvage Officers returned with their profits.

Halliford waited for them in his office, counted out the greasy notes—for he never accepted cheques—presented them each with five pounds, and said, " It's coming on. I'm pleased." Then Gin would stand Lime a whisky and soda, and the next day the amassing of salvage would start afresh.

Fortunately, Halliford's other employees did not find it unusual for so much to be ruined. This process had been continuing in the natural course of events for many years.

If anyone remarked on the strange trouble Gin took in removing the junk, he would point out how much tidier the laundry looked. Gin was, without any doubt, the intellectual in the Salvage Department.

Within a year, Halliford owned three laundries and three converted chapels. The possibilities were unlimited. Gin and Lime were made directors and placed in sole charge of salvage. Before expanding his activities even further, Halliford insured against the future. He tackled the question of welfare for his laundry staffs with characteristic thoroughness and energy.

First, he invested in excellent canteens and large, well-appointed playing-fields. Then, he built estates of fine if modest houses and allowed his workers to live there at nominal rents. He paid them well, and gradually fostered in them a deep sense of debt towards Halliford's Laundry Combine.

A new company, Gin & Lime Limited, was floated to deal in second-hand clothing and rags, and Halliford acquired a vast network of old-clothes shops, auction stands, and storage warehouses. It became almost true to say nobody had a rag to his name except Halliford.

Customers complained, naturally. But, by virtue of a meticulous filing system and careful supervision, each one lost only four items a year—losses which were, for reference purposes, designated at Board Meetings as the Quarterly Contribution.

By special concession, Joe Blubber alone was exempted from

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the Quarterly Contribution, merely losing two shirts a year. Each of his letters—beginning with the first, momentous one—was framed and hung in Halliford's office—like the diplomas displayed by bakers and toothpaste manufacturers and allegedly won, always in 1907, at some wildly improbable Exposition in Tierra del Fuego.

Profits were good. By the beginning of the war, Halliford controlled laundries all over the country and had standardized the service they offered the public. He owned a mansion in Sevenoaks, two limousines, a lodge in the Highlands, and a yacht. All on salvage. Gin and Lime each owned one limousine, a villa at Worthing, and fishing-rights in the Border country.

There was no sphere of industrial activity in which the influence of Halliford's Laundry Combine was not felt: an engineering works was even established to produce the complicated machinery required in the modernized and re-equipped laundries. Cuff-frayers, collar-warpers, blanket-burners, antimacassar-destructors, and blouse-shredders were but some of the wonderful new patented devices that spated out to laundries from the north of Scotland to the Channel Isles. Daily, fleets of lorries traversed the country, redistributing people's clothing.

Halliford became a legendary figure—much in demand as a public speaker, known alike to the wealthiest in the land as an equal and to the young as a guide and example. He became prominent in the war-time salvage drive, and was knighted.

In 1946, as a Victory bonus, from every regular customer—or contributor, since he preferred that appellation—Sir Tiberius forwent one Quarterly Contribution, except from Joe Blubber, who already enjoyed special concessions. Then he settled down to the peacetime task of advancing the empire of destruction. He consulted his solicitors and reduced yet further—and to even smaller print—the laundries' liability for lost articles.

Sir Tiberius was, as far as his nature would ever permit, a contented and satisfied man. He bought a country estate in anticipation of a title and vowed to himself that, on his elevation to the peerage, he would inaugurate a rebate system whereby every twenty-seventh piece of clothing lost by each customer would be replaced free of charge, from the nearest converted chapel.

Gin and Lime were happy, too. Gin, the organizer, Lime the executive, were inseparable, devoted to each other and to Halliford. At a word of praise or encouragement from him they would sacrifice all pleasures and bend their energies to devising new methods of destruction, new ways of salvaging.

But Joe Blubber could not be silenced. Gazing at the letters

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on his office wall, Sir Tiberius had never thought about Blubber as a human personality, only as the involuntary agent of the opposition, a challenger who first threw down the gauntlet and then never had the grace to admit defeat.

Yet Blubber's personality was vital, full-blooded, and choleric. Praised by his wife, opposed by the rest of the world, he had continued to write to the papers on a wide variety of subjects, on all of which he claimed to be an authority. But he was still bewildered by one thing. In thirty-five years he had lost seventy shirts to the omnivorous Halliford's Laundry Combine. It was beyond him.

Then, the youngest Blubber—Cedric—married. His wife, adoring and romantic, embroidered his initials in petit point on all Cedric's shirts, in bright emerald-green, surmounted by a mauve-coloured heart. The embroideries were sheer delight to Cedric. When, in a mere six months, two of his four shirts had been engulfed by the laundry, Cedric was heart-broken.

His wife promised more mauve hearts, but somehow they would never be the same. He lost weight, grew thin and miserable; at last his doctor ordered a holiday by the sea, and in desperation, his wife suggested they buy another shirt—though they could ill afford it. Listlessly, he agreed.

They wandered through the shops until, in the window of a pawnbroker's, they saw one similar to those the laundry had exacted as contributions. When they took it home and examined it more carefully, they found, in the middle of the sleeve, an embroidered heart in mauve with emerald-green initials.

"That's it, dad. That's my shirt."

"Ay, lad, it is," Joe agreed. "For thirty-five years I've wondered, and now I know. Seventy shirts in thirty-five years—"

"Yes, you've told us, dad. But what about my other embroidered shirt? Will you write a letter to the papers?"

Joe Blubber sat back, his face purple with vicarious outrage. Then, he jumped to his feet and made a vow to his son, sensing with deep insight that this was his moment, that this once he could achieve the magnificence of a Sydney Carton.

"Lad, this is more than a mere writing matter. I'll see the man at the top!" . . .

A nervous secretary tapped lightly on the solid mahogany. When Halliford bid him enter, "Sir Tiberius," he stammered, "there's a man to see you."

"A duke, an industrialist, a shop-steward—or someone unimportant?"

"Unimportant, sir."

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"Throw him out."

"We've tried, sir, but he says you know him. His name is Blubber."

"What, Joe Blubber? An old friend, indeed. Show him in. Send for Mr. Gin and Mr. Lime from the Central Chapel." Sir Tiberius smiled, glad to meet this old, unknown challenger, heartened by the thought of a personal joust with a hitherto-unseen opponent.

Blubber was a little overawed by the panelling, the extravagant proportions of the furniture, the vastness of the office. Sir Tiberius walked towards him, hand outstretched. "My dear Mr. Blubber. Won't you sit down? Have a cigar."

He installed Blubber in a large comfortable chair and then offered him whisky. "Now, what can I do for you?"

"It's about shirts."

"A fascinating subject. I have your letters still," Sir Tiberius remarked jovially, indicating the forty-four framed pieces of crumpled paper decorating the walls.

"That's as may be. But this is about my son's shirts."

"Don't say he's losing them, too?" Sir Tiberius inquired, solicitous, almost smug.

"He sends them to the laundry, and they don't come back."

"Well, we have our little accidents."

"Once every six months," Joe commented bitterly.

Sir Tiberius smiled warmly, which infuriated his visitor even more. "Now, look here, Halliford, this has got to stop. My lad bought back his own shirt, which you had lost, in a pawn-shop."

Halliford burst into uncontrollable laughter. What more delicious triumph could he have had over Blubber? Joe was used to people arguing and losing their tempers with him, but not to laughter. The sight of Halliford, with tears of pleasure creeping down his cheeks, was the final insult.

"You thief!"

"Calm yourself, my man." Halliford tried to control his own laughter. "Pure coincidence, I assure you."

"Oh no, it wasn't coincidence. You've ruined a year of my son's life." Joe seized a long, heavy paper-knife lying on the desk and advanced towards Sir Tiberius. "That's what happened to my seventy shirts. I'll put a stop to this."

Halliford backed, alarmed, until he stood against the wall, surrounded by Joe's letters. He wondered how Blubber, the only one to be excused the Quarterly Contribution, could be so ungrateful. He was on the point of shouting for assistance when Gin and Lime entered.

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Gin understood the situation immediately, pressed the burglar-alarm, and flung himself at Blubber's back. The paper-knife crashed against the desk, harmless; Blubber and Gin, and then Lime became horribly mixed up, and minions descended on the office from every direction, anxious to be conspicuous in their devotion to duty.

Joe was justly sentenced for assault and battery, and Sir Tiberius raised to the peerage. But he was never the same man. He missed his six-monthly letter; he never saw another customer. He was protected by a host of officials who, ever after, were paid interview money—to compensate for the danger of their work.

Gin and Lime tried to stimulate his interest, to tempt him to see their exciting new machines—button-crushers and handkerchief-dicers—but Lord Halliford had sunk into a gloom from which nothing could recall him.

Without the challenge of Blubber, there was nothing left in life.

★ ★ ★

ANSWERS to UNREAL ESTATE on page 10

1. *The March Hare's house, in "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," by Lewis Carroll.*
2. *The poet's home, in "Past and Present," by Thomas Hood.*
3. *The Quangle Wangle's Hat, in Edward Lear's poem.*
4. *The pleasure-dome, in "Kubla Khan," by S. T. Coleridge.*
5. *The Castle of Otranto, in Horace Walpole's gothic novel.*
6. *The moated grange, in Tennyson's "Mariana."*
7. *The Pension Dressler, in "Scoop," by Evelyn Waugh.*
8. *Stella Rodney's war-time home, in "The Heat of the Day," by Elizabeth Bowen.*

PRIZE CROSSWORD No. 24

Argosy's twenty-fourth Prize Crossword Competition appears on page 144. There will be one-guinea book tokens for the first five correct solutions checked on the closing date. If you do not wish to cut Argosy, copy your solution on to a plain sheet of paper, adding your name and address in capital letters. Entries should be completed *in ink*, and posted to: ARGOSY PRIZE CROSSWORD (No. 24), 3 Pilgrim Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp), to arrive by Monday, May 9th, the closing date. We regret that entry must be limited to readers living in Great Britain, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands, and Eire. There is no entry fee and the Editor's decision is final. Names of the prize-winners in this competition and the solution will appear in the issue of Argosy on sale July 8th.

Names of prize-winners and the solution of Prize Crossword No. 21 appear on page 143.

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BLACK SABRE

BY

JOHN DICKSON CARR

★

ARGOSY'S
EXCITING NEW NOVEL

OPENING CHAPTERS

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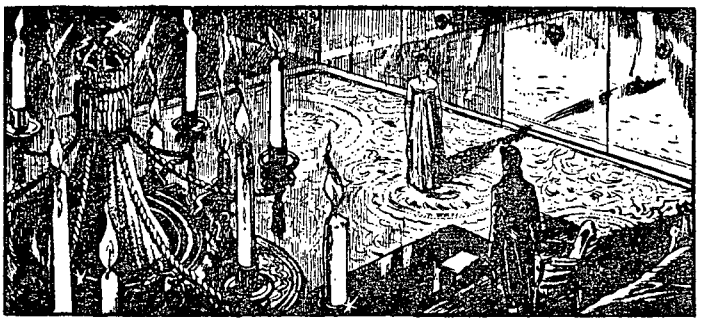

Thrills! Adventure! Mystery!

ALONG the whole length of the Iron Coast, from Alprech Point to Cape Gris-Nez, five out of seven corps of the Grand Army breathed the salt air of the English Channel.

The shadow of the new Emperor lay long across Europe. Behind massed guns, the camps, fevered to impatience, stirred with a hundred and fifty thousand infantry, ninety thousand cavalry. Their centre was the Odre cliff at Boulogne, where the Emperor's grey pavilion looked out across a grey-green Channel towards the cliffs of Dover.

Restless, restless, restless! The four camps, from Ambleteuse and Wimereux to Outreau and Le Portel, echoed to two thousand drums which were seldom still. By day you heard the low, thick roll or the spring-rattle tap; the stamp, clink, and snuffle of horses; over all, a crawling growl of voices talking at once.

By night, when it was quieter and a cold wind tore across chalky, light brown headlands, rose the quarter-hour shout from the quays along the harbour below: "Sentinels, attention!"

The inner harbour, crammed with shallops and flat-bottomed barges, was guarded by sentries at only fifteen paces apart. Back floated a mournful chorus farther out, amid broken light-reflections, from sailors in the shiptops.

"Good watch! Good watch!"

It was ghostly when you contrasted this, by day, with the cursing or the laughter of embarkation exercises on the beaches. All waited for the Emperor, though in the early days he was seldom there.

If he brought with him the handsome, full-blown Empress amid her laughing ladies-in-waiting, they stayed at the château in the village of Pont-de-Briques, nearly a league away on the Paris road. Only the Emperor himself stayed at the pavilion, with his valet and his bodyguard. There he would peer through his great telescope, or sit for hours gesticulating in the council-room while everybody else had to stand up. Outside it, his grey riding-coat was all over the place: never still.

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And yet, as the summer of 1805 waxed towards its hottest, that piled-up welter of men had gradually drawn towards an edge of nerves from too long inaction, from too much crowding, from too few women.

If all the artillery of the Iron Coast cut loose at once, from the battery of monsters on the Odre cliff to the guns of the two forts in the outer harbour, they said its noise would have thundered in Kentish hopfields. But to some French officers, gnawing at the undersides of their moustaches, it would have seemed less loud in imagination than the words cried at once from so many throats: "Why won't he get a move on and invade England?"

And now, the news had been creeping out, there was something much worse.

The night was a bad time, an eerie time for sentry-go. With an unknown murderer loose in the Boulogne Camp—appearing from nowhere, stabbing sentries, and then vanishing like a ghost—it might be a spark to powder.

Captain Cut-throat.

Late on the afternoon of August 20th, under the greasy shimmer of a heat-haze, a horseman in the uniform of the Hussars of Bercy galloped out of the Haute Ville of Boulogne by the Porte Neuve and the route de Calais, along the roundabout way which led towards the Emperor's pavilion.

He rode like the devil, his dolman and busby-feather streaming out, a half-image in moving dust. He had a mission, but there was something else very much on his mind. As he drew near the middle of the camp, all those acres of wood and mud-walled houses arranged neatly in streets and avenues, the horseman sought someone, anyone, with whom he could speak.

The only person in sight was a common soldier of nondescript dress. He was a burly man, past his first youth, with a heavy moustache and shaggy dark hair. He wore no tunic; his breeches, waistcoat, and high-buttoned gaiters were all of a dingy white. Standing in the trim, tiny front garden of one of the thatched houses, built to shelter fifteen men, he was sprinkling flowers from a watering-pot. The officer of Hussars reined in, amid settling dust. "Hoy! You!"

For a moment the burly man did not glance up. The watering-pot, painted bright blue, looked like a toy in his hands.

"Did you hear me, grand-père?"

Grand-père raised his head, and slowly surveyed the man on the horse. Then he spat, in a majestic arc from under his moustache.

"Shut that," he said, from deep in his throat. "Wipe the mother's milk off your moustache, my brat!"

A half pleased, wicked smile tightened down the horseman's mouth over the brass links in the chin-strap of his high busby. Though he spoke French like an Alsatian, he had been born in Prussia. He was a blond young man with a long, bony jaw and a nose of high arrogance; dust-stains whitened the freckles against the sweat of his long face.

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"I am an officer," he explained. His voice also was young, cold, poised. "Perhaps you have heard of me. I am Lieutenant Schneider, of the Hussars of Bercy."

Grand-père spat again. "And I," he said, "am Jules Dupont, grenadier of the Imperial Guard. So—?"

Some distance away, a howitzer whacked from the direction of the harbour. Lieutenant Schneider, savouring the lesson he meant to administer, glanced in that direction. Over so many acres of thatched houses there was little to be seen except the tall flagstaff between the Emperor's pavilion and the smaller pavilion of Admiral Bruix.

A strong wind, always raking those cliffs, whipped out flags run up as signals to the ships. From the beaches below, the wind rolled a faint, vast, struggling noise of troops at embarkation exercises.

"Jules Dupont, grenadier of the Imperial Guard," said Lieutenant Hans Schneider, and committed the name to memory. He sneered again. "Well, grand-père. You made Syria, I suppose?"

The man looked back at him for an instant, and then went on sprinkling flowers with water out of the blue watering-pot.

"I have warned you once, Dupont. I won't warn you again. —You made Syria, I suppose?"

"Italy, Egypt, Syria . . . Ah, bah! What does it matter?"

"That is a better tone, Dupont, though I mean to see it improved before I leave you. And aren't you at all curious, grand-père? Don't you want to hear the news?"

"News?" growled the other, eyeing him. "Why should I guess what I can hear on sentry-go at Pont-de-Briques? The Emperor has been in Paris to see his Minister of Marine. Tonight," and Dupont's shaggy head jerked southwards, "he'll be back at the château with his women. Tomorrow, he'll ride here to kick up a row about something, so you run ahead to warn Soult. No, no, my young friend! *You* want to hear the news."

"I?"

"Hell, yes! The news of Captain Cut-throat. He stabbed another sentry last night. And two of Joyet's pals were looking on while it was done, but didn't even sight the whiskers of the man who did it."

Lieutenant Schneider's long, powerful legs seemed to grow longer as he stood up in his stirrups, above the saddle and the zebraskin saddle-cloth. Though his light blue tunic was dust-splashed, the greasy sun flashed back from arabesques of silver braid across his chest, and across the fur-trimmed blue dolman swung from his left shoulder.

"That's impossible! You lie!"

"Lie, do I?" yelled Dupont of the Imperial Guard. And the guardsman told the Hussar officer exactly what he, Lieutenant Schneider, could do. "Now ride away and play, brat!"

From his saddle-holster Lieutenant Schneider took out the long flintlock pistol. Carefully, with deliberation, he fired straight at Dupont's heart, and shot him through the left collar-bone instead.

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Lieutenant Schneider's chestnut-coloured mare did not even blink at the unexpected powder-flare or bang of the shot. But it was as though the mare's hind hoofs had kicked Dupont spinning backwards, kicked him back on a sanded path decorated with a little trimming of sea-shells. The blue watering-pot flew wide, its contents gleaming under the sun, before it landed in a flower-bed.

Out of the house plunged and tumbled three more men of the Imperial Guard, all in undress. One, his face lathered, held a razor. Another was brushing the long-tailed uniform coat, once dark blue, which exposure to all weathers had turned muddy grey.

" I, myself, shall report this to Marshal Soult," said Lieutenant Schneider, replacing the pistol. " You guardsmen, I fear, think you're the Emperor's pets. Learn better next time."

Flick went the wink of his spurs, lightly against the mare's flanks. Lieutenant Schneider bent low and rode hard. His long jaws, framed in their wiry yellowish side-whiskers, appeared better pleased. He rode into the full reek of the camp, a travelling dust of cooking and horses and troops.

On his right stretched away the sun-baked earth of the parade-ground where, a year ago, the Emperor had reviewed his whole army under the eyes of the prowling English frigates in the Channel; and where, in four days' time, there was to be another grand review. Lieutenant Schneider did not draw rein until . . .

The road was partly blocked by a six-gun battery of Light Artillery, which had no business to be there at all.

When one gun-team dropped the off-front wheel of an ammunition-wagon into a pot-hole, there had been an accident almost unheard of; the axle broke but the powder-cart crashed down without further damage. Cynical artillerymen, who could endure much and spit far and were now wondering why they had not been blown to pieces, gathered round a young and nervous officer with a fluff of golden-brown moustache.

" An accident," cried Lieutenant d'Albret, " which could never have been foretold. Never! Is it worse, I ask you, than to have in the camp a murderer like a ghost, who can't be seen even when he walks in the light? "

D'Albret checked himself, and froze. Every man froze, hand on horse or gun-limber.

It was as though, into their midst, had fallen a shell with a sputtering fuse. Every man was conscious of that shell, but not one would pretend to notice it until it exploded. They seemed to feel it in the very pores of the skin when Lieutenant d'Albret blurted out the unsayable: *Captain Cut-throat.*

A horse whinnied. Hans Schneider, who had been about to ride past the steaming gun-teams, again stood up in his stirrups. This time, ingratiatingly, he bared his teeth in an attempt at a polite smile. " You, sir! " he called out to the too-young Lieutenant d'Albret. " I could not help hearing what you said about our murderer. I am Schneider, Hussars of Bercy. Perhaps my name or face may be familiar to you.

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" I hear," he called, " there has been another killing: very well! But a fool of a grenadier says that other sentries were watching the victim and still saw nothing.

" You, sir, is that true? "

Lieutenant d'Albret flushed and bit his lip like a girl.

" Yes, it's true! The sentry was attacked from in front: just like Saulomon of the 7th Light Infantry! But this man could have fired at anybody who came near; he was standing in full light for metres on every side of him. And yet two witnesses, who were looking straight at him, swear he was alone when he screamed and doubled up.

" Nobody can talk of anything except Captain Cut-throat," cried Lieutenant d'Albret. " But what, sir, does our General Savary do? Nothing! "

" So? " inquired Schneider. " If they would really find this assassin, they must go much farther for a man with wit enough to arrest him. They must go to Paris."

" To Paris? "

" To Fouché, the old fox! To Fouché, the red-headed skeleton! Fouché, from what I have heard, knows how to keep dogs chained and the mob in its place."

Though the Grand Army professed to be careless or even contemptuous of the dreaded Minister of Police, who was said to keep five thousand spies in Paris alone, Schneider could have mentioned no more potent name than that of Joseph Fouché.

" However," he added, with an air of secret pleasure and a resumption of his former aloof manner, " that is no business of yours or mine. Who was killed last night? What regiment? "

" I don't know—officially! They won't announce it. But . . . everybody knows it was Grenadier Joyet, of the Marine Guard."

" And in full light, you say? Where, in the night, could any sentry look about him in full light? "

" Come, now," exclaimed Lieutenant d'Albret, flinging away all caution. " There could have been only one place for this murder. Don't you understand? "

Schneider stared back, his dust-caked lips framing some word they could not catch. Then he tossed his busby, and was off at so hard a gallop that within half a minute he had come near his destination.

Far behind him and to his left, rose the slope of the Haute Ville of Boulogne with the semaphore-arms on the tower of its town hall. Just ahead, near the edge of the cliffs above the glittering waters of the Channel, was the Emperor's long wooden pavilion with its glass-enclosed front. Night or day, occupied or empty, it was protected vigilantly.

Four grenadiers of the Guard paced there now, muskets shouldered and red plumes flying, in the high bearskin caps they wore on parade.

Schneider glanced at the pavilion, as though derisive yet faintly speculating. Then he looked past the flagstaff, past Admiral

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Bruix's small pavilion, to the little hut with the conical thatched roof where Marshal Soult lived half underground like a savage.

At the sudden devasting roar of noise from below, even Schneider could not help jumping and flinging round his head. Amid so many yells of execration, from men dancing with fury on the beaches, two voices clove through.

" *The English ship! The same English ship!* "

" *Always the same one? Are you sure?* "

" *Yes, very sure! Look! Grand dieu, where are our guns?* "

In an instant he got his answer: thunder half splitting the sky.

Some of the English cruisers, nose-thumbing, would run in under the batteries and loose a broadside for the devil of it. But this most insulting of all nose-thumbers, the forty-four-gun frigate *Medusa*, which never fired a shot . . .

In she stood, running before a fair breeze, straight on a line between the Fort de Crèche and the Fort de Bois.

Lieutenant Schneider galloped past the Emperor's pavilion to the edge of the cliff. For the third time he stood up in his stirrups above the zebraskin saddle-cloth.

Though she was still far out, he could discern *Medusa*'s rakish brown-and-red lines, and the sungleam on her two gun-decks. Up from the conical-roofed hut, ape-like, popped Soult himself. He stood there with brass telescope raised, the gold oak-leaves gleaming against his marshal's tunic, and his great cocked hat printed black against the fiery sky. Through his telescope he could have seen the wrinkles in the face of the man on the quarter-deck, *Medusa*'s captain, who had not yet troubled to raise his own glass.

Without a telescope, they could all see the patches on the frigate's snowy canvas and her (literally) nose-thumbing crew. They could fancy if not hear the crack of canvas as her mizzen-topsails backed and filled. As the frigate came round broadside, somebody in the Fort de Bois found the range. A round-shot smashed and carried away her bowsprit, and howls of triumph from the beaches nearly drowned the gun-crashes. Momentarily the frigate staggered as though struck with a fist; French infantrymen went mad with joy and jumped in the water. But the frigate, despite flapping canvas and wrecked cordage, got away like a dancer and beat to windward under the fire of both forts.

Thick gunsmoke blew back above the sharp tang of seaweed. Lieutenant Schneider, his eyes bitten by chalk-particles there on the windy cliff edge, lifted and shook his fist.

" That is insolence," he said aloud. " That is insolence we do not endure. Never to fire a shot, never to break out their colours, never to—"

" Gently, my friend! " struck in another voice.

Schneider, furious and flicking the reins with his wrist, had just escaped cannoning his chestnut-coloured mare into another horse, a fine dapple-grey, whose rider was sitting motionless and looking at him.

The other cavalryman wore the green coat of the Mounted

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Guides: a dark green, its red collar and cuffs vivid against gold-buttoned white waistcoat. He was a young man of about Schneider's age, with a sun-tanned, humorous face. Above a dark moustache his eyes and even his nose would have been mocking if the man himself, both by instinct and training, had not been polite to the point of indolence.

Schneider looked the newcomer up and down without favour. "Be good enough," he said, "not to block my path. Perhaps you have heard of me. I am—"

"Yes. Yes, I know!" said the other cavalryman. "And *I* am Mercier, Guy Mercier." He touched the single gold epaulet he wore. "A humble Captain of the Guides, as you see. As for you, sir, in the past half-hour your name has been all but graven on my heart."

Whack! Whack, went a last salvo from the coast.

These two looked at each other, and something ran between them like light along a sabre-blade. Both horses shuddered and moved, but not from noise. From the left hip of each horseman, sabretache rattled against sabre.

"But I must apologize," continued Captain Mercier, in a deceptively innocent tone. "I have been following you, out of curiosity, ever since (quite properly, of course) you corrected that grenadier for *his* insolence. Then, when you began speaking of our ever-glorious Minister of Police, you really interested me. Are you acquainted with Joseph Fouché?"

"No. I am not. But I admire his methods. Why does it interest you?"

"Because," Mercier said musingly, "I am not sure you understand his methods at all. When I knew him . . ."

"*You* knew him?"

"I had that honour, yes. As a very young man, when I studied for the priesthood at Nantes, the then-hungry Fouché was my instructor in logic and mathematics. Since then he has risen very high in the world: he has served Robespierre during the Revolution, and betrayed him; he has served Barras during the Directory, and betrayed *him*; now he serves the Emperor, and serves him well. He is quite untrustworthy and quite ruthless. But there is a certain likeable fascination about him. If by chance he were called into this affair . . ."

"*I* have heard he was to be called in," Schneider bared his teeth. "You would be good enough to approve it, Captain Mercier?"

"Approve it?" cried Mercier, with enthusiasm. "My friend, I cherish it as a romantic dream! The Minister of Police could not be here himself to find Captain Cut-throat; but he could send an agent. You know, I hope, that when possible he prefers to employ a woman?"

Schneider stared at him. "A woman? A woman to trap Captain Cut-throat? A woman at the Boulogne Camp?"

On the edge of the windy cliff, above the green-glittering Channel

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and the smoke of the last firing, Mercier swept up his arm as though to invoke all the powers of the air. "Why not two women?" he demanded. "Why not anything? When Joseph Fouché takes a hand in the game, the very card-sharpers run and hide to escape his tricks. Where, I wonder, is the Minister of Police at this moment? What devious plot is he spinning now?"

At Paris, two nights later on the 22nd of August, the dreaded Minister of Police was receiving a guest.

From outside, his lair looked like a row of tall, dingy stone houses close-set along the whole length of the quai des Augustins beside the Seine. Actually they had been turned into one house, a rabbit-warren of communicating doors, a hive of offices paper-crammed and stuffy in the heat.

At the extremity of one wing, in a room rather spacious, though curtained and airless because Joseph Fouché had a weak throat, the Minister of Police sat behind his flat-topped desk, with a candle burning in a pewter candlestick on either side of him, and smiled with genuine charm.

"You understand, my dear," he said to his present visitor, "that I am never surprised?"

"Yes, yes, of course I understand!" answered Madeleine, attempting to laugh. "All the same . . ."

Madeleine, blonde as a Grecian Venus, had a rich and warm laugh, an infectious laugh, when she could summon it up at all. At the moment, however, she was terrified and sick with foreboding. She knew she had done no wrong, but by this time she felt the whole world must be leagued against her.

The darkness was pierced only by those two burning points of the tapers, shining on Fouché's long, emaciated cheeks and his dusty-looking red hair. In addition to everything else, the stifling heat of the office held a vague, sour smell like that of illness; it made her nostrils twitch.

But the Minister of Police was not in the least ill. Pleasantly, disarmingly, he held up a bloodless hand.

"—And that, as I have explained," he went on, "was the situation as it existed two nights ago, when the Emperor arrived back at Boulogne and sent the order I have just read to you. Permit me to read it again."

His long hand, with its upstanding, shiny knuckles and pale blue snake-veins, moved to his left and picked up a piece of paper. The movement of the hand made one candle-flame undulate slightly.

"*Adopt what means you choose,*" he read, "*but deliver this Captain Cut-throat to the military authorities within one week.*"

"One week?" cried Madeleine.

"Precisely."

"Commencing from when?"

"Presumably from two nights ago, the 20th, when I received this message by Monsieur Chappe's semaphore."

The Minister of Police put down the paper at his left hand.

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Tall and slight, rigid and high-shouldered, with a black muslin neckcloth wound round his long frail throat, he spoke as dispassionately as the schoolmaster he had once been. And then he smiled, showing bad teeth.

"Now listen to me with care. Apart from one corps commanded by Bernadotte in the east, and another corps commanded by Augereau in the west, the entire Army is in the north.

"Everything waits, hangs, holds its breath, for the Emperor's thunderbolt stroke against England. When will it come? I do not know. Where or how or by what strategy? None can say.

"But this much I tell you. One thing alone could destroy the Emperor's plan for invasion; and, more important, might destroy a raw new Empire as well. That is mutiny in his Grand Army. Already, according to General Savary, the men have been kept waiting too long. Therefore . . . do you feel faint or unwell?"

"No, no, not in the least!" lied Madeleine. "But I still don't understand how all this concerns me!"

"Then have patience."

The Minister of Police's words rapped out. His eyes, red-rimmed in the long, agreeable face, never ceased to study and weigh his visitor.

Madeleine's age, twenty-six, he knew as he knew so many other facts about her: from the green-bound paper file at his right elbow.

More than merely pretty, soft of body without being too heavy or too slender, she looked back at him with the candlelight heightening the warmth of her colouring from the pink lips to the dark-lashed blue eyes.

Her heavy, fleecy fair hair had been done up into a cluster of small, shining curls on top of her head. Her face, faintly flushed, was a mingling of the sensual and the innocent. Her fingers had ceased to clutch at the arms of the chair.

Instead, those fingers, pink-nailed against white, toyed with the silver fringes of a light silk shawl, figured with silver acorns, thrown carelessly across her shoulders. The shawl was mere ornament. Madeleine wore little under her high-waisted gown, of even thinner silk, in that grey colour which French designers called London-smoke.

"Therefore," pursued Joseph Fouché, "this Captain Cut-throat must be found and shot. Anything else would be worse than a crime."

"Then what *do* you wish?"

"Let us consider your record."

His thin black-clad arm swept to the right. He picked up the file, set it in front of him with great nicety, and opened it.

"I would not frighten you," he said gently. "Frightened, you would be of no use to me. And I regret that my representative should have been obliged to seek you out in the Palais Royal."

Colour flooded into Madeleine's face. "The Palais Royal is filthy, squalid, and I hate it!"

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"On the contrary, my dear, it has all things for all tastes. Dressmakers, jewellers, perfumers, gambling-houses, brothels—The last word distresses you. I had forgotten you were brought up in England."

"Please don't mock me!"

"Had I any intention of mocking you? Your record, now."

Casually he turned over a page in the file. "Marie Madeleine Lenormand," he went on. "Born at Paris on 8th July 1779. Father, French, deceased, was the proprietor of a fashionable school for young English ladies. Mother, English, is still living and is addicted to somewhat dreary charitable works."

"On my word, Monsieur Fouché, I am not disloyal to my own country! I own I have a divided loyalty; I am half English; I can't help that. But I swear I would do nothing against the Emperor!"

"Tcha," said the Minister of Police.

Madeleine swallowed hard.

"In '93," continued the unruffled Fouché, "the family of Lenormand fled to England to escape what is today known as (tcha, tcha) the Terror. Your father died. Your mother busied herself charitably and not very profitably with Dr. Braidwood's London school for the deaf and dumb, and with the Bethlehem Hospital for the insane. You yourself, with a pious and commendable filial devotion, assisted her. In April 1803, during the Peace of Amiens, you returned alone to France."

"But in what way have I committed a crime? Tell me that!"

"Now," insisted Fouché, turning round one finger to point at her, "I would urge you, for your own good, to be frank with me. When you returned to France in April 1803, why did you not inform the police that you were married?"

"I . . ."

"Come, madame, you cannot control your breathing."

Joseph Fouché brushed his hand across the page of the file.

"On the 12th June 1802, at the Church of St. Anne, Soho, you were married to a young man named Alan Hepburn. I applaud your good fortune. Monsieur Hepburn was wealthy, accomplished, the elder son of a noble Scottish family. You were a veritable Cinderella, madame: at Devonshire House, at Carlton House, you trod the quadrille in very exalted circles. This marriage, which was one of love and even of violent passion—"

"I beg of you—"

"—This marriage, I say, was never dissolved. But at some time in March 1803, you and your husband officially parted. Why?"

With a spasmodic gesture Madeleine lifted her hands as though to adjust her hair, and pressed her fingers hard against her cheeks. She did not hate Alan Hepburn: no, not now. Over and over she had assured herself that her feeling, at long last, was one of merciful indifference. She would never have believed that the mere mention of his name would cause a leap of her heart, and a thickening in her throat, and a stab of all the old, intolerable pain.

It was unfair; it was even terrifying. But it was true.

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For an instant, this dust-speckled office, with its frayed carpet and its dingy green panels outlined in blackening gilt, dissolved before a memory of more gracious rooms and a cleaner sky. The fiddles sang under painted ceilings; and she, uncertain and unsure of herself, amid perfumes and landscape fans and the twittering of gossip, stumbled as best she could through a Whig society more aristocratic than the Tory.

Everything narrowed, with anguish, into some vision of Alan Hepburn. Alan, with his charm and his wayward brilliance of mind which (she had often raged and protested) he would never employ to any useful purpose; Alan, who could coax her into a state of . . .

"At some time in March 1803, you and your husband officially parted. Why?"

"My husband and I separated for private reasons."

"Now may le bon dieu strike me dead," said the atheistic Minister of Police. "I am aware that you must have separated for private reasons. But I would know those reasons. What were they?"

"My husband—chose to desert me."

"Indeed? He deserted you for another woman?"

"I don't know. *I don't care.* Is it of importance?"

"What I am endeavouring to discover, madame, is the reason for this sudden separation after less than a year of marriage. There was a quarrel, perhaps?"

"No."

"No quarrel? You interest me. No screams or tears or fainting-fits? No note of farewell pinned in tragic grandeur to the bed-curtains? Come, madame!"

The extraordinary intensity of Fouché's tone, the dry snake-rustle of his hand on the page of the file, struck a dagger of warning even through her preoccupation. If she had known him better, she would have remarked the most ominous danger-sign of all.

From the tail-pocket of his coat the Minister of Police took out a snuff-box. It was an oval snuff-box of fragile rose-agate, its lid set round with a circlet of diamonds enclosing a bee and the letter *N*, and its diamonds glittered incongruously in that dingy office. The snuff-box had been a present from the Emperor, who hated him with an epileptic rage but found no other man quite so useful.

Gingerly, the Minister of Police opened the box and took snuff. His movements were deliberate and even delicate. But his long hands trembled, and his eye strayed across the desk towards the hand-bell with which he summoned his secretary.

"Before I terminate this interview, in a fashion most unpleasant for you . . ."

Madeleine sat rigid. "What is it? What have I done? Do you not believe a word I have been saying?"

"In candour, madame, I do not. Would you deny, for example, that you are still in love with your husband?"

"Well! I . . ."

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" You run away to Paris. It is a coincidence, I suppose, that he arrives here shortly before you arrive yourself? "

" Alan is here? *In Paris?* "

" You did not know that? "

" No! "

The lid of the snuff-box closed with a snap.

" You were unaware that all this time he has been living in the faubourg Saint-Germain, posing as a Frenchman and calling himself the Vicomte de Bergerac? You never assisted him in any of his activities?

" You were even unaware that for the past seven years he has been the most astute secret agent in the employ of the British Foreign Office? "

" *Nom de dieu, what are you saying?* "

The Minister of Police rose to his feet and towered over her. The thick air of the room stirred sourly, and he reached down with a significant motion towards the hand-bell on his desk.

" Alan Hepburn was arrested forty-eight hours ago."

At about the same time, on that same night, a coach with a coat of arms on its panels was driven fast along the quai des Augustins. And in the coach sat another young woman with some interest in Alan Hepburn.

The clocks had just gone ten. A heavy, sickly moon was rising above the dust-powdered chestnut trees along the quai. With a lurch and jolt on uneven paving, the coach swung left into the narrow rue des Condamnés, towards the most inconspicuous of all entrances to the Ministry of Police.

But the coach, as though from long custom, stopped some distance away. Its travelling-lamps had not been lit; the lane was as dark as your pocket. The woman, who seemed to be wrapped in a long cloak despite the hot night, disdained any assistance from the coachman. She sprang down with a lithe freedom of movement, and hurried towards an open archway in a grey stone wall on the right.

Faint yellow light, filtering through the archway from a lamp in the courtyard beyond, was cut across by the cocked hat and scarlet coat of a police-guard.

" Eh? Yes? Who's there? "

The woman merely stopped and looked at him. He cursed, growled an apology, saluted, and stood back.

The woman had crossed the courtyard of shuttered windows, and was raising her hand towards the only door in sight, when she stopped to look sharply at a horse tethered to one of the stone hitching-posts outside the door.

It was a light-cavalry horse, with a zebraskin saddle-cloth. That zebraskin saddle-cloth, the woman knew, was the badge of one of the Hussar regiments now stationed at Boulogne . . .

Boulogne! The woman in the cloak stood motionless, her strong white teeth in her underlip.

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According to rule, no military horse should have been in this courtyard at all. But, if Marshal Soult had sent a messenger galloping fifty leagues from Boulogne instead of using the semaphore, if that messenger had slipped by the most secret and urgent way into the presence of Joseph Fouché . . .

It was as though, distantly, the drums of the Grand Army tapped and tapped towards a crescendo. And the woman's thoughts went out to them.

The weather was right. The tides were right. The British fleets had been lured away to Gibraltar and the West Indies, leaving their coast all but defenceless. Now, if ever, was the poised moment for invasion. *Now*, as the hot night throbbed with drums, was the time to strike.

At her brief signal-rapping the door was opened almost immediately. She straightened her shoulders and swept into the hall. "Good evening, Monsieur Levasseur."

Ida de Sainte-Elme's shrewdness and self-assurance for ever warred with a wholly primitive nature. Her complexion was as golden-brown as that of an Egyptian: the cheek-bones high, the nostrils wide, the lips somewhat broad and hard in edge. Carrying her head a little on one side, under its topknot of glossy black curls, she regarded the world from long, narrow eyes of a luminous dark brown, with a secret and humorous look at the outer corners.

Now, catching sight of her companion's face, she laughed and let the cloak slip from her shoulders to trail from her right hand. Her tawny skin glistened through a gauzy and transparent gown of Nile-water green, fastened with a gold waist-cord and slit up the sides to allow freedom of movement. "I obeyed my instructions," she said, "as soon as I conveniently could. I do not wish to risk being seen here more than is necessary—"

"Understood, madame! Understood!"

"And I shall tell the Minister of Police so. Is anything wrong, Monsieur Levasseur?"

"No, madame, no! But I regret that it will be impossible for you to see Monsieur Fouché at the moment. He is . . . occupied."

"Oh? With the messenger from Boulogne?" She laughed again. "Tonnerre de dieu, Raoul! Surely it is evident? You must not jump so."

Her companion had not really jumped. All that ailed him was the physical presence of Ida de Sainte-Elme.

He was a thin, ugly, dark-faced young man, whose position as secretary to the Minister of Police had been the reward of fanatical faithfulness and industry.

She advanced towards him, never taking her eyes from his face. "Raoul, Raoul, Raoul! Is it necessary to be discreet with *me*? Have we not been friends?"

"Yes," said the young man, and swallowed and looked away. "We have been friends."

"And shall be again, when I have time."

"*Time?* Is that all it means to you? Time!"

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"It is all it means to me at the moment, Raoul." Savouring her power over any male creature, Ida delighted to approach him so closely that he flinched. "The future, of course, may be a different matter. What is the news from Boulogne?"

"It—it is bad. Captain Cut-throat . . ."

The expressive face changed again.

"Tonnerre de dieu! Captain Cut-throat has not . . .?"

"Not since the night of the 19th. But . . . it is of no importance, I tell you!"

"Is it of no importance, Raoul? Who is this messenger from Boulogne? Is the news he brings so vital that *I* must be kept waiting?"

Raoul Levasseur made a harassed gesture. "The messenger is a Lieutenant Schneider, of the Hussars of Bercy. But . . ."

"But what?"

"Madame, I am in hell because of you; I can think of nothing else. In any case, you have not been kept waiting because of the messenger from Boulogne. Monsieur Fouché is questioning someone else."

"Oh? Who is he questioning?"

"The wife of the British spy. The British spy you discovered for us. The British spy who calls himself the Vicomte de Bergerac."

The effect of this announcement was hardly what he expected.

Ida de Sainte-Elme backed slowly away. She was wearing calf-length buskins of soft white kid-leather, embroidered in gold thread; they made no noise on the black-and-white marble floor. But her body, in the transparent green gown, was polished and silhouetted against the light of the three candles; and now, by some trick of the light, the gown appeared rumpled and disarranged like the moss-rosebuds in her hair.

"Wife?" she repeated in a high, thin voice. "*Wife?*"

"Yes. Clearly, this wife has been aiding him for years. We discovered he had a wife because of a certain book and because the so-called Monsieur de Bergerac, under laudanum, said her name in his sleep. He does not think we have learnt of her existence even now. She is a Frenchwoman, brought up in England: blonde, very beautiful, and in some eyes, no doubt, desirable . . ."

Suddenly Ida flung away the cloak from her right hand, so that it fluttered and fell to the floor.

"I will see the Vicomte de Bergerac," she said.

There was a silence, while the young man stared back at her. "Sacré nom," he said, as though praying. "*You* are in love with the British spy!"

"I am in love with no man! But is the Minister of Police, I ask you, so very squeamish all of a sudden?"

"M-madame?"

"For seven years," said Ida through stiff jaws, "for seven years, here in France itself, a British agent has been upsetting every diplomatic plan and penetrating the disguises of our best agents. For two years he has actually been living among us. And nobody,

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not a soul, knew who he was or could guess at his identity until *I* discovered it. This young Vicomte de Bergerac, who entertained so lavishly in the faubourg Saint-Germain, who made jokes and threw away money and received the Legion of Honour from the Emperor himself, was nothing but a spy of Pitt and Castlereagh!"

She had backed away until she was standing beside a bust of the Emperor. The chilly, sculptured eyes, ruthless even in marble, looked out beside her own.

"You have him now; you have him fast in the cells below. But what happens? He is treated as gently as though he were a friend instead of an enemy. He is not even put to the question," she meant the torture, "though it might tell us everything we want to know. Yes. *I* will see the Vicomte de Bergerac."

A belated caution rushed back to Raoul Levasseur. "No, madame, no! I forbid it . . . That is to say, the Minister of Police forbids it. This—this Englishman does not even know it was you who gave him away . . ."

"Nor shall he know, believe me, until I am prepared to tell him."

"Madame, listen! The Minister of Police, I may tell you, plays a hidden game of his own . . ."

"Yes!" cried Ida, and clenched her hands. "I thought so!"

"Madame?"

"Always, always, always our good Fouché must play some double-faced game. What is it now? He hates . . ." She became abruptly conscious of the marble bust beside her, and glanced round at it.

"He hates . . . No, Fouché does not hate anyone. He is too cold-blooded, too detached, too dried to anything except self-interest. But, if he saw the Emperor's star setting and luck turning the other way, he would—"

Though Ida was not over-tall, she was supple and strong of body; and she jabbed out furiously with both hands. The marble bust rocked and tottered on its pedestal. Raoul uttered a cry of horror and sprang forward to retrieve it. Then the two of them, both panting from very different emotions, looked at each other past that inscrutable face.

Ida's dusky red lips folded back over her teeth. "The Vicomte de Bergerac, I suppose, is still in the Room of Mirrors? *Take me to him!*"

From somewhere near at hand there was the scrape and grind of metal.

Both of them, starting guiltily, glanced round.

Under the archway on their right, as they stood in loving-kindness beneath the Emperor's eye, a marble staircase led up to a waiting-room. Under the archway on their left, another dusty marble stair led down to a heavy door barring the way to the cells.

A knocking at the outer door, not loud, but firm and authoritative, dinned and dinned in Raoul Levasseur's ears. Another courier

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was expected from Boulogne; he hurried to the door and unlocked it.

Outside, curved sabre bumping at his heels, the dismounted horseman moved stiffly, first on one leg and then on the other. His green tunic, lined and faced with scarlet, was a blur of dust like his white waistcoat. From busby to red-topped boots he was dust, except for amused eyes and smiling teeth.

Raising one gauntlet to slap dust from his busby, as though in compromise for a military salute, he spoke courteously. "Captain Guy Mercier, 2nd Regiment, Mounted Guides. I was instructed to identify myself by . . ."

Raoul Levasseur swung round and muttered despairingly under his breath. Ida de Sainte-Elme's cloak still lay on the floor. But Ida herself had gone.

At that moment, in fact, she was standing at the far end of the underground passage to the cells, looking down imperiously at a red-coated gaoler, who sat behind a table and cursed to himself over an interrupted game of cards.

"Do you hear me?" cried Ida. "By order of the Minister of Police, I am to see the prisoner at once. Do you doubt my authority from Monsieur Fouché?"

"Doubt it?" snarled her companion, flinging down his hand of cards and looking up at her in the light of a fish-oil lamp. "Why should I doubt it? You've put enough of 'em in the cells, lord knows." He spat briefly over his shoulder, and got up. But he did not touch the bunch of keys at his belt. Instead, after picking up a pistol from the table and examining its priming, he stretched out his left hand towards what appeared to be a blank wall.

The famous Room of Mirrors, in which so many had been watched during their last hours, was an adaptation and not an invention of Joseph Fouché. Its four walls which appeared to have no doors but actually had four, and its ceiling, were of skilfully joined looking-glass. Once the principal room of a brothel, it had been thriftily refurbished so that no movement of its occupant, no turn of eyes or twist of facial expression, could go unseen from eight pairs of spy-holes concealed in small and gilded wooden satyr-faces round the mirror walls.

This room was more than sinister: put to its present use, under ceaselessly watching eyes, its breath of forgotten lusts had an air of ghastliness. As the red-coated gaoler pressed a spring and rolled open a narrow, head-high panel, it may have been this that made Ida de Sainte-Elme hesitate. But she slipped inside, and the panel closed after her.

There was no furniture here, except a bed now stripped of its canopy, a wooden table, and an armchair. Alan Hepburn—alias Alan Latour, Vicomte de Bergerac—sat beside the table, under a brass chandelier of candles hanging from the mirror ceiling.

Physically, at least, he had been well treated. Alan Hepburn had always kept up the pretence of being a great dandy. He was clean and freshly shaven; his thick brown hair was brushed in that

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elaborate style made fashionable by the Prince of Wales. Even his high white collar and white neckcloth of lightly starched muslin, also in the new fashion, were tolerably clean.

He was a thin, wiry, agile man in his late thirties, with a high and faintly lined forehead. His eyes, cat-green under slanting brows, had a humour and recklessness like his lined mouth.

Since he had been arrested on the way to the opera, he still wore the black satin evening-coat and black satin breeches with gold knee-buckles. So he sat there—one finger marking the page in the book he had been reading, his image endlessly repeated in the mirror walls—and looked back at his visitor.

And still, as the seconds stretched out, Ida did not speak. She no longer felt any anger towards him; all her rage had been concentrated on another person. Towards him she felt . . . felt . . .

Alan rose to his feet.

Carefully, as though to keep his hands from trembling, he put down the book on the table. He had been brought up by a French nurse, and learnt to speak French before he could speak English; nothing in his accent told of his nationality.

" Hullo, Ida," he said lightly.

" Alan," said his visitor; and then she burst out, " Alan, Alan, *Alan*! "

She ran to him, across the dirty red carpet; she threw her arms round his neck and pressed herself against him in a fury of tenderness which was at least partly sincere.

" Come now," objected the prisoner, and patted her back, " it isn't as bad as all that, you know."

" Isn't it, Alan? Do you realize how bad it is?"

" Shall we say that it's damned inconvenient? "

" Darling, darling, I rushed here as soon as I heard you were arrested. I only learnt of it two hours ago, at a ball at Monsieur de Talleyrand's; and it's very fortunate he likes me. I pleaded and pleaded with him; otherwise, of course, they'd never have permitted me to see you. Alan, Alan! It breaks my heart to think . . . to think . . ."

Alan Hepburn looked down at her. For the first time his cat-green eyes showed wrinkles of amusement at the outer corners.

" You know, Ida," he said, " this isn't at all necessary."

" What isn't necessary? "

" This flourish of high tragedy. Do you think I don't know, my dear, that it was you who gave me away? "

Silence, while the gilded wooden satyr-faces multiplied round the walls.

The ease with which he could read her thoughts, was the quality that at once infuriated her and attracted her. She could never govern him, never be sure of him, never quench that easy and well-mannered mockery; and rage made her wholly primitive again. There was no anger in his look, none at all. The more philosophically he accepted facts, the more she wanted to scream that it wasn't true.

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"*I?* Gave you away? Alan! You can't possibly think that *I* . . .?"

"It doesn't matter, I tell you!" Suddenly there was an edge in his voice. "You were an agent of Fouché the Fox; I represented His Britannic Majesty. Why the devil should I blame you for doing your job? I gambled and lost: that's all there is to it."

"But I didn't betray you! I didn't!"

"Just as you please, Circe. Still, if I hadn't left my dispatch-box unlocked, on the last night you honoured me with your company in bed . . ."

"I swear to you, on my oath before the Virgin Mary . . ."

"That you never even looked in that dispatch-box?"

"Never!"

He tilted up her chin, and amusement-wrinkles deepened round his eyes. Ida wrenched away from hands which made no attempt to restrain her. Her voice shrilled up. "And if I proved to you, proved beyond any doubt, that I would die and suffer damnation before I would have betrayed you?"

Now, she saw him hesitate. Perhaps she did not realize how near he was to breaking-point over a certain problem in his own mind. Alan turned away, meeting only the turning reflections of his own image and of his companion's pursuing eyes.

Weariness and uncertainty haunted a lean face which was perhaps a little too fine-drawn.

"Ida," he burst out, on an almost pleading note, "they want me to do something. And I won't do it. I can't! They say they'll give me until tomorrow morning to decide. But my life is forfeit; I know that. Why can't they shoot me and get it over?"

"You're not afraid, are you? The great Vicomte de Bergerac, with all the prizes in the fencing and riding competitions for civilians? Afraid?"

"Yes," he said flatly, "I'm cursed afraid. I wish I could say I weren't."

"Then you ought to understand, my dear, that there's only one woman who cares for you. Alan, you fool! Do you know who really betrayed you to the police?—It was your wife."

Alan Hepburn could control much, but he could not control his response to this. The book, a thick volume with gilt-edged leaves, slipped through his hands and sprawled open on the floor. "That's imposs—" he began; "Madeleine's in London!"

"And if I proved to you, Alan, that she is talking to the Minister of Police at this very minute?"

The bone-structure of his face showed clearly in the hot, flary light of the candles.

"God Almighty," he said in English, and pressed a hand over his eyes. "Harrowby must have been right."

"Milord Harrowby," cried the astute Ida, instantly fitting together real information with quick, flying guesses, "The British Foreign Minister in the Addington administration! And your wife is a Frenchwoman!" Inspiration opened wide. "You were

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told, weren't you, that your wife had been spying on you for the French? Did Milord Harrowby tell you that?"

"If he hadn't told me, do you think I should have gone away and left her without a word? Harrowby said he was certain. Even so, do you think I've never wondered? Or regretted what I did?"

It was as though the mirrors cracked and dissolved before Ida's eyes. "Regretted it?" breathed Ida. "What lies are you telling me now? What do you mean? Alan! This—this woman can't mean more to you than *I* do?"

"She means everything to me. Do you see that book on the floor? It belonged to her. I've kept it by me, like a fool, when it might have led the police to me at any minute. For over two years I've been remembering her, regretting her, picturing her—" Ida made a sudden dart at the book, but he gripped her shoulder and held her back.

"So that's what you've been thinking!" said Ida, with a little gasp and scream. "And you call her name in your sleep, do you? Well, remember this! No man who has been with me ever forgets it, or forgets me, either! In that way, at least, I can make you forget your blonde!"

"You are mistaken, madame. If by chance Madeleine walked in here now, it wouldn't matter in the least what she had done as a French spy, provided only she hadn't married me just to spy on me!"

"Oh, help me," screamed Ida, now past all endurance. "Wait till I get my hands on her! She betrayed you. Shall I tell you what the Minister of Police means to do, Alan?"

It would have taken a miracle, apparently, to have diverted Ida's attention just then. And yet something did. She whirled round. Outside one door of the Room of Mirrors, an invisible door, rose up the voice of the surly and glowering gaoler who sat on guard there.

"Monsieur Levasseur!" shouted the voice, dinning back amid the mirrors. "Have you gone crazy? Give me back my pistol, imbecile! *Give me—*"

There was the snap of a door-catch. The invisible panel, pushed by a frantic hand, rolled open. And Raoul Levasseur sprang into the aperture.

Against the prim, snuff-coloured clothes of that conscientious young man, with his hair tied in a neat queue at the back of his neck, stood out the sick anguish of his eyes and mouth. In his hand was the pistol, loaded and primed, which had lain on the gaoler's table outside.

There was a click as the hammer went back. "You will betray no more of the Minister's plans, madame," he said.

He lifted the pistol, aimed it at Ida de Sainte-Elme, and fired.

Madeleine Hepburn, sitting rigidly in the armchair on the other side of Fouché's desk, beyond the burning points of the candles, looked at the Minister of Police with eyes that scarcely saw him.

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" *Alan Hepburn was arrested forty-eight hours ago.* Before I terminate this interview, madame, I give you one more chance. Unless you are prepared to assist me, he will be shot tomorrow morning."

Fouché's words hung there, almost visibly, one moment meaningless and the next moment weighted with terror.

The Minister stood, high-nosed and high-shouldered, behind his desk. A momentary wrath, real or assumed, whittled his emaciated cheeks. In one hand he held the rose-coloured snuff-box with its circlet of diamonds.

" The name of Ida de Sainte-Elme will naturally be familiar to you? What you are not aware of," said Fouché, " is that Madame de Sainte-Elme—who has been so much in your husband's company—who appears to be such a flamboyant ornament of society, is, in fact, an agent of mine. She is remarkably astute. Whatever may have been your husband's intentions towards her, she was pursuing him because she suspected him. Examination of certain of his coded papers, after one of their happy nights of love . . . Did you speak, madame? "

" No, I said nothing. Nothing, nothing, *nothing*! "

" Examination of these papers, I say, revealed the Vicomte de Bergerac's real name and mission here as an agent of your Foreign Office. Will you acknowledge now, dear lady, that nothing is unknown to us? "

The instant Fouché spoke those words, she had known in her heart they were true. Out of the past so many aching contradictions, so many words and looks, so many cryptic scenes were suddenly illuminated like faces in a dark room.

Then Alan might not have deserted her because of another woman, or because . . .

Through these mazy and scurrying thoughts, fast approaching the edge of hysteria, stung a dry and deadly voice: " Do you honour me with your attention, madame? "

" You—must forgive me, Monsieur Fouché," gulped Madeleine. " The shock of hearing of my husband's arrest . . ."

" Then you no longer trouble to deny that you assisted him in his espionage work? "

Madeleine began to speak, and abruptly stopped. What if this might be a trap? What if Alan had admitted nothing—or had not even been arrested at all?

" I neither confirm nor deny anything," she retorted, " I demand to see him! Where is he? You haven't—harmed him? "

" Am I a fool, madame," inquired the Minister of Police, turning down the corners of his mouth, " that I should damage one of the best brains in Europe just before I mean to make use of it? "

" If you have any pity at all, Monsieur Fouché, you will stop this game of cat-and-mouse! You say Alan will be shot tomorrow morning *unless* I assist you. But why should you make any terms with me? If Alan is really a spy, you won't spare him and you know it! What can I do for him? What do *you* offer him? "

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" I offer him his life," replied Joseph Fouché, " if he can discover the identity of Captain Cut-throat in five days."

During a thunderclap of silence, while nothing on earth seemed to exist except this stifling, dust-speckled room and Fouché's face, Madeleine still sat rigid.

" You would use a British agent," she cried, " to . . . ? "

" To trap a British agent? Obviously. Can you think of a better man than your husband—if he does so willingly? And he will do so willingly, dear lady. You will see to that."

" *I?* "

" Let me explain very simply," pursued the Minister of Police. " The evening of your husband's arrest coincided with the evening of the Emperor's order from Boulogne. From the first it was evident that the Vicomte de Bergerac was the mysterious British agent who has been plaguing us for so long. As I frequently stated when his identity was still unknown, I wished I could employ the fellow myself.

" I offered him his life if he would trap Captain Cut-throat. He replied that he would be shot ten times over before he did any service for ' Boney.'

" Now, this intrigued me. This was a challenge. Each man has a weakness; it did not take long to discover his. A harmless-looking volume of Shakespeare's comedies in French had on its flyleaf your Christian name and an inscription in his handwriting which it would be mild to call impassioned. Also, if a man of highly-strung temperament be kept awake long hours and then given laudanum, he is apt to speak revealingly afterwards. It took my agents in London only until this evening to identify you as his wife and trace you back to Paris."

Madeleine could keep silent no longer. " Does Alan know that . . . that . . . ? "

" That you are under arrest as well? " inquired Fouché, with a rap of his bony forefinger on the lid of the snuff-box. " No, not yet. But you have ' demanded ' to meet him; and you shall."

Carefully he replaced the snuff-box in the tail-pocket of his rusty black coat with the pewter buttons.

" Your husband, though he pretends to sit and read quietly, is showing signs of regretting his quixotic conduct. He is breaking down: not a pretty process. Now is the time to approach him."

" Monsieur Fouché, I . . ."

" As a woman, dear lady, you are a realist. Do you prefer to have him shot? "

" No, no! I will do anything! But, if Alan *does* agree to do as you wish, can you promise to spare his life? "

" In candour, madame, I cannot promise absolutely. Should he fail to find Captain Cut-throat in five days, the Emperor will demand a scapegoat. But I should greatly dislike to lose an excellent new agent, once he is bound to my service—"

" Bound to your service! Dear lord! "

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"—And I shall save him if I can. Very well: then we understand each other. You will persuade Monsieur Hepburn to go to Boulogne on this mission. You yourself, as his confederate of a long time, will of course accompany him. I should have thought you too fastidious to indulge in this work; and Monsieur Hepburn, perhaps, too fastidious to allow you. How could you ever have been of use to him? Why, naturally, by using your own kind of professional talent to extract secrets from other men, as Madame de Sainte-Elme does! How else?"

Madeleine stared at him. "You think that I . . .?"

Then Fouché stalked forward, holding the light still higher. "Come here," he requested.

"*What do you want?*"

"Come here, my dear," repeated the Minister of Police, extending his corpse-like hand. "Come with me." He took her into an ante-room. Fastening the fingers of his right hand round her bare arm, he turned her face towards a map of Europe. The light aureoled his red hair and made skullpits of his eyes.

"Observe, what I indicate to you on this map. Here are the British Isles. Here is our own coastline, sweeping round down the Bay of Biscay to Spain. Now is the time for the Emperor's stroke, because the seas are clear. Nelson, with his usual impetuosity, has allowed himself to be lured away. Collingwood, Cornwallis, Calder are also out of the path. Our own Villeneuve, with a formidable fleet, moves north to hold the Channel.

"Even on land, at the Emperor's back"—the candle-flame now swept to the right—"his threats have disposed of all possible enemies. He is supreme, omnipotent, the thunderbolt of destiny to strike *here*. What, then, could possibly prevent invasion?"

Fouché's grip on Madeleine's arm turned her sideways. And she caught sight of the Emperor's portrait. It was as though the living man had come twitching and thrusting to look over her shoulder.

The Emperor was little, delicate-featured, angry of blue eye under the famous cocked hat. In Madeleine's imagination, she saw the nervous and recurrent jerk of his shoulder he gave when he was excited. Against his green coat shone only the star of the Legion of Honour and the little silver cross he gave his troops.

"What, then, could possibly prevent invasion?" repeated Fouché, lifting red eyebrows. "I shall tell you. A mutiny caused, apparently, by his own generals."

"His own *generals*?"

"Just that! Some are jealous of his rise to power. Some are genuine republicans who hate the Empire. But for a long time, either loudly or softly, republican principles have been preached by half the able commanders in the Grand Army. Masséna, Augereau, Lannes—" Each name, sharp and distinct, rang like a hammer-blow of war. "Oudinot, Lecourbe, Macdonald! There exists a dangerous secret society called the Olympians, dedicated to establishing a republic. The evidence shows that its agitation

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reached a height about a fortnight ago. Then, on the night of 13th August, came Captain Cut-throat.

"A sentry of the 3rd Engineers, patrolling the south-west corner of the Field of the Balloons just after midnight, was caught from the back by an adroit, noiseless assassin of great physical strength.

"This sentry, the first victim, was stabbed through the back of the neck with a heavy and broad-bladed dagger. I have the dagger here in my office now. The victim died without a sound, almost within sight of others.

"In the blood soaking the back of his tunic was stuck a dirty piece of paper bearing only a few words in a disguised handwriting: 'Yours sincerely, Captain Cut-throat.'

"The second victim, a sentry of the 57th line-regiment guarding an ammunition-store at Le Portel on the night of 14th August, screamed once before a dagger just like the first was driven through his heart from behind. There was another scrap of paper: 'Yours sincerely, Captain Cut-throat.'

"To be precise, both these scraps of paper, when examined by General Savary's Military Police, were found to be signed with pedantry or from some other cause as 'Captain Cut-the-throat,' instead of the familiar Cut-throat, which would be used by anybody from the highest marshal to the lowest conscript; and, in fact, has been used ever since. For practical purposes, it has not mattered.

"The third victim, a sentry at the quayside of the inner harbour on August 15th . . . but I spare you all these details, which are familiar to your husband. Each night Captain Cut-throat moved, step by step and murder by murder, from a point far outside the camp to its very centre.

"Then, as the climax of all, came the night of 19th August. There is only one space in the camp brightly lit after dark. This is, in a sense, its centre: the oblong enclosure round the Emperor's pavilion on the Odre cliff. Round all four sides of this oblong is a head-high fence of stout wooden palings; at intervals, only a short distance apart round the fence, hangs a row of reflector-lamps. These lamps, reflector-side inwards, illuminate everything. Day and night, the space inside the fence is patrolled by four sentries.

"At shortly before midnight, on August 19th, Captain Cut-throat appeared again.

"Grenadier Emile Joyet, of the Marine Guard, was approaching one side of the fence with a loaded musket on his shoulder. Two of the other sentries were actually looking at him, because he was whistling. Grenadier Joyet shouted out and doubled up and fell. The other men could see the whole lighted space for many yards round him, both inside the fence and outside, and not a soul had come near him. But he had been stabbed through the heart. The dagger was gone. And at his feet lay another of Captain Cut-throat's notes."

Joseph Fouché paused. "Either the Emperor must launch his

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invasion at once, which would cure everything by curing inaction, or he must crush Captain Cut-throat before another murder can be committed. Well, madame? "

Madeleine fought hard against nightmare, both her own and the one he had outlined. She would not, would *not* allow herself to be driven to desperation and stupidity. She moved to one side, stumbling, until she encountered the metal mouths of the speaking-tubes and could go no farther.

" Well, what? " Madeleine demanded. " What do you expect me to say? "

" Have you no comment to make on all this? Do you see no indication, at least outwardly, of where we must look for Captain Cut-throat? "

" Of course! This revolutionary secret society called the Olympians—if it really exists."

" It exists, madame. Believe me! "

" If it exists, and you don't know who is the head of it, surely they must look for Captain Cut-throat among its highly-placed members? "

" Are you quite certain of that? "

" No, I'm not certain of anything! What could I know of ghost-murderers at Boulogne? What has all this to do with me, and whether or not I happen to be a British spy? "

" You are a British spy, madame," replied Fouché, with sudden ferocious tenderness. " I applied a little test, and it has succeeded admirably."

" You . . . *what*? "

" Be tranquil, my dear: when I thought for an instant you might really be as innocent as you looked, I was half prepared to give you the benefit of the doubt. Now, however, I shall proceed with my scheme exactly as I had intended from the first, after you have been confronted with your husband in the Room of Mirrors. In the Room of Mirrors, at this very time—"

Madeleine had opened her mouth to protest, when she screamed and jumped away.

Someone, two floors below, had fired a pistol-shot.

The noise of the shot, fired in that enclosed space, whacked against the mirror walls and rebounded with stunning concussion. A whole genie-bottle of grey smoke, conjured from nowhere, blotted out both Raoul Levasseur and Chavasse, the lanky, blue-chinned gaoler, in the aperture of the open panel behind. You would not have thought a single charge of black powder could have exploded with so much smoke. It spread and swayed; its raw, harsh, burnt odour gouged the nostrils and choked in the throat.

" Monsieur Levasseur! " yelled the gaoler, and began to cough. He was almost invisible in the smoke; he leapt through the aperture, a few playing-cards still in his hand. " I'm Chavasse, Monsieur Levasseur! Your friend Chavasse! Hoy! "

Then he ran forward.

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The bullet, fired at Ida de Sainte-Elme's heart from a distance of about ten feet, had missed her left side by a matter of inches. Her left arm was lifted, or it would have smashed the arm. Even so, since under the gauzy green gown she wore nothing except a short flower-apron and her kid-leather buskins, the powder-grains had burnt the flesh of her side.

Ida did not wince. She stood motionless, a rapt look on her face, as Raoul Levasseur took form, ghostlike, through the mist.

He also stood motionless. But, as Corporal Chavasse called out again, the whites of Levasseur's eyes turned up. An ooze of foam rolled at one corner of his locked lips; he pitched face forward on the red carpet, twitched once or twice like a landed fish, and lay still with his pistol-hand almost touching the fallen volume of Shakespeare's comedies.

Alan Hepburn, heavy and sick at heart, knelt down beside him with Chavasse kneeling on the other side.

"Gently!" said Alan. "Turn him over and loosen his neck-band. Easy—that's it!"

"Is he—?"

"No. But he's in a fit, poor devil, and you may have to fetch a physician. You know, Chavasse, he's not a bad sort, this lad."

Ida, regarding the whole scene with shining and greedy eyes, was glowing and hugging herself with both arms beside the splintered cracks in the mirror.

"Damn my eyes," said Chavasse, "she's enjoying this!"

"And why shouldn't I enjoy it?" inquired Ida, with a graceful little curtsey. "It's exciting, exciting, exciting! One day, mark my words, I'll ride in a cavalry charge and find out what it's really like! Poor Raoul, though. *Poor* Raoul! What happened to him?"

"As though you didn't know, my chicken. You've been trying your bawd's tricks on him, haven't you? You're the one who . . ."

"Monsieur Fouché will hold you responsible for all this," said Ida sweetly. "You should have barred the outer door to the corridor, and you know it."

"Now, look!" yelled Chavasse, leaping to his feet. "Young Levasseur came racing down here almost as soon as you did . . ." Chavasse broke off and swung round.

Booted footsteps, with a clink of spurs, strode along the corridor beyond the open panel. Into the aperture stepped, with considerable curiosity, a young officer in the uniform of the Mounted Guides, his busby cradled in his arm.

"Forgive me," said the voice of Captain Mercier, "if I intrude." He sniffed the powder-reek. "But the Minister of Police's secretary, for some reason, bolted down here without a word and left me standing in the foyer. Then, I heard what sounded like a shot, and I could have sworn the Minister of Police himself ran down the stairs, though I don't see him anywh—"

Here, catching sight of Levasseur's distorted face on the floor, he drew in his lip and stopped. The harassed Chavasse had only time to cry, "Get out, get out!" before more booted footsteps

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strode along the corridor. Into the Room of Mirrors shouldered another army officer in the uniform of the Hussars of Bercy.

"No, now, this goes too far!" snarled Chavasse, picking up the empty pistol from the carpet. "We shall have all Paris in here in a minute, because that fool of a Benet left the corridor door unlocked. You, young man! And you too, in the Hussar breeches! In the name of the Minister of Police, I command you to leave!"

Lieutenant Hans Schneider's upper lip lifted as he stood there negligently. "You spoke to me, my man?" he asked.

"I am Corporal Chavasse, of the civil police—"

Catlike or tigerlike, Hans Schneider had cleared away every trace of dust from face and uniform. His dark busby, from which the plume had been removed, made him seem very tall. Against his light blue tunic, fitting snugly to shoulders and waist; arabesques of silver braid glittered on chest and right sleeve. His light blue breeches, with a red stripe, ended in polished Hessian boots. Under the fur-trimmed, silver-braided blue dolman swung from his left shoulder, his left hand supported the long sabre.

His pale blue eye looked down with contempt at the dirty, ageing Chavasse. A dazzling image in many mirrors, he might have symbolized the youth and arrogance of the Emperor himself.

"Corporal Chavasse, of the civil police," said Lieutenant Schneider. "Well, Corporal Chavasse, of the civil police," he added in a heavy, mimicking tone, "let me show Corporal Chavasse, of the civil police—" Carelessly, in a leisurely way, he lifted his leather-gauntleted right hand; with the flat of it, backhand, he whacked Chavasse so viciously across the mouth that they saw the broken soles of the corporal's shoes as he sprawled—"how an officer of the Emperor deals with insolent civilians," concluded Schneider.

Alan Hepburn, still kneeling beside the unconscious Levasseur with his forefinger on Levasseur's pulse, glanced over towards Chavasse and up at Schneider.

"You take too much upon yourself, sir," he said. He spoke mildly, but the temperature of the room shot up several degrees.

Hans Schneider looked down. Marking the other's black satin evening-coat, the gold knee-buckles, and the jewelled watch-fob hanging from the waistcoat-pocket, Lieutenant Schneider condescended to notice him. A pleased, wicked smile tightened the corners of Schneider's mouth. "And if I do?" he inquired.

Alan did not reply. He carried Levasseur over to the bed, where he put the man down gently.

Hans Schneider's voice snapped across the room. "I think I spoke to you, sir?" he said.

"So you did," said Alan, and turned round with his thumbs hooked in his waistcoat-pocket.

"Must I teach *you* to be civil too?"

"Evidently. Why don't you try it?"

Schneider flicked back the dolman looped to his left shoulder,

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so that his right hand could dart across to the hilt of his sabre.

And, at the same time, there was a clang and clatter as Captain Guy Mercier, who had been unfastening the straps that held his own sabre to his belt, hurled the sheathed sabre rattling on the table—its hilt within easy reach of Alan's hand.

Alan looked at it, and glanced back at Schneider. The Hussars of Bercy, by a battle honour won in Egypt, were the only light-cavalry regiment to carry straight sabres. Mercier's sabre was of the usual curved pattern, but it was the same length and weight.

And Alan smiled. An unholy joy shone in his face. From behind his smile, from behind the slightly hollowed cheeks and the long, green, gleaming eyes under sardonic brows, all the repressions and nerve-strain of years came boiling out.

"Yes, you overbearing swine," he said softly, "why don't you try it *now*?"

Hans Schneider made a noise like a man hit in the face. His right hand whipped across to his sabre-hilt. Alan's hand darted at the same time. Then, before either blade could jump more than three inches from its scabbard, both hands were caught and held as though by the lash and coil of a whip.

"That will do, now!" said Joseph Fouché from the doorway. "That will suffice, thank you. Finish it, both of you!"

The Minister of Police, in his rusty black coat and pepper-and-salt trousers, snuff-box in his hand, stepped across the threshold.

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His thin nostrils were pinched. His fingers trembled slightly as he lifted the box, with its diamond letter *N* glittering against a grubby shirt-front, and took snuff.

" Madame de Sainte-Elme," he continued, " you will please restrain the lust of conflict I see in your face. Captain Mercier, my old pupil, you seem to forget your customary discretion: take back your sabre. Lieutenant Schneider, you have been instructed in a high quarter to receive your orders from me. Sheathe that sword, young man! "

Fouché's gaze moved across to Corporal Chavasse, still half-dazed and with blood coming from his mouth.

" And a word of warning, Lieutenant Hans Schneider," added the Minister of Police, shutting up the snuff-box and replacing it in his pocket. " Raise your hand against another of my servants; and, army or no army, I will have the shoulder-straps torn from your tunic and yourself reduced to the ranks. Is that understood? "

Schneider's face, under its freckles and red sunburn, was white and rigid. But for some reason, he seemed willing and even glad to let the sabre slip back into its scabbard. " Minister of Police," he said, " I have more than once spoken my admiration for you and your methods "—here Fouché looked at him curiously— " or I should not be in Paris now. I was under no compulsion to . . . to carry a dispatch. But, when I am no longer under your orders, I have a score to settle with more than one person here."

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It was as though Alan Hepburn breathed clean air for the first time. His eyes were fixed curiously on the steel handguard of Schneider's sabre. "If I live until tomorrow, Lieutenant," he declared, "you shall have your wish at the first opportunity. Captain Mercier, I thank you."

And, taking up Mercier's sword and scabbard, he bowed and handed them back.

The Minister of Police moved slowly over to the bed and stared down at Raoul Levasseur. "He has had these epileptic attacks before. We had better have him moved upstairs to my living-quarters."

Fouché lifted his hand and snapped his fingers. An invisible panel in another wall, at right angles to the first, rolled open to admit two scarlet-coated *agents* of the civil police. At his gesture, they raised the unconscious man and bore him out of the room.

"And now," said Fouché, "the three of you will go upstairs and await me in my office. I wish to have a talk with the prisoner."

Ida, with a last look at Fouché, swept out. Mercier followed her. The panel closed.

When he was certain the others had gone, Fouché asked Chavasse, "What exactly happened here, to make Levasseur lose his head?"

"Well," said Chavasse, with a broad gesture, "Madame de Sainte-Elme rushed in here and played a scene like the best actress at the Comédie. She said she'd been staggered to hear about Bergerac's arrest. Bergerac, being no fool, gave her the horse-laugh. Then she flew out at him. She swore she hadn't done it. She said Bergerac's wife was a French spy, and was the one who gave him away . . ."

"That his *wife* was a *French* spy?" The boast of Joseph Fouché was that he could never be surprised. Yet Alan, who missed nothing, did not miss the lightning-brief inflection of astonishment.

Alan's right hand gripped the edge of the table, in a hope like intense physical pain.

"I don't know what game Bergerac could have been playing," babbled Chavasse. "But, believe it or not, he pitched her a yarn that his wife *was* a French agent, and only married him to spy on him. That's what Bergerac told the cocotte, anyway! He swore that's why he'd deserted her!"

Round swung the Minister of Police, an avenging Mephistopheles. "What does this mean, Monsieur Hepburn?"

"What does," Alan swallowed, "*what* mean?"

"Did you say all this to Madame de Sainte-Elme?"

"Yes!"

"Why did you say it?"

"Because I believed it myself—until I saw your face a few seconds ago. Now I'm not so sure. *Is* it true, Father Satan? *Is* Madeleine a French agent, employed by you?"

"Listen to me, Monsieur Hepburn," said the Minister of Police, beginning ominously to reach after his snuff-box, "what you hope

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to gain by this stratagem I cannot tell. But I *know*, by an infallible test I applied myself, that your wife is in actual fact a British agent who has been assisting you in your work for years . . ."

"Madeleine—you think *she* is a *British* spy?"

"And I warn you, here and now: if you carry this pretence too far, and force me to prove what I say by having her executed in front of your eyes, I am quite prepared to give the order."

"Wait! Listen to me! For heaven's sake, will you wait?"

"No, my friend, I will not. Do you acknowledge this woman as a British spy, or do you not? For the last time, yes or no?"

"If you could have torn yourself away for half a second from the sound of your own voice," shouted Alan, "you would have heard ten minutes ago that you've beaten me. You've won: you've backed me into a corner and scared all the decency and good intentions out of me. Yes, I'll go to Boulogne. I decided to save my life, and be hanged to the consequences, before you mentioned Madeleine's name at all!"

Dead silence. Alan Hepburn stood upright, stiffly, supporting his weight with both hands on the table. The sound of his breathing rose thinly. Then he sat down in the armchair beside the table, and put his head in his hands.

"Ah!" murmured Fouché; then with a sharp rap on the lid of the snuff-box, "you are sure it was not your wife's predicament that caused you so suddenly to change your mind? *Was* it that?"

"*No!*"

"I shall pretend, at least, that I believe you. But you understand the magnitude of the task you undertake? And that it will not necessarily save your life? Listen, a whole army, crazed and mutinous in the north, is asking but one question: *who is Captain Cut-throat?* The risk to yourself, should you fail to find the answer to that question . . ."

Alan Hepburn struck the arm of the chair. "The risk to myself," he said, "is not worth two sous if you keep your part of the bargain. I can already tell you where to find the murderer."

If there can be degrees of silence, in a room where not one of the three men seemed to breathe at all, this silence had reached its height in the Room of Mirrors. Fouché, about to give another rap on the lid of the snuff-box, stood perfectly still. A very curious look flickered in the red-rimmed eyes: flickered, speculated, then cast away doubt, and was gone.

"It is vital," said Fouché, with his eyes nearly shut, "that I have at least some inkling of your notion. We agreed yesterday, I think, that Captain Cut-throat was very obviously an Englishman?—Did we not agree?"

"Try to find out!"

"It would desolate me," said the Minister of Police, with cheerful urbanity, "to antagonize a new agent who must remain willingly in my service after he has betrayed a fellow Englishman as being Captain Cut-throat. So I do not compel you—at present. Let us return, then, to the question of your wife. Since you have

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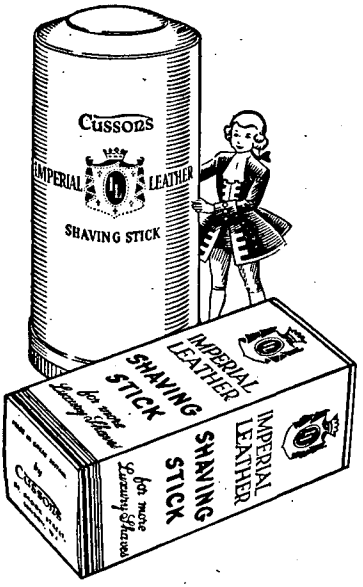

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agreed to be reasonable, it is apparently not necessary to bring her in here. Nevertheless, you shall have that privilege at once.

"For some time," pursued Fouché, with his eye on Alan, "Madame Madeleine has been watching and listening to us, under duress, from outside this room. She is in charge of Sergeant Benet. I am now going upstairs. As soon as I have gone, you will admit the lady to this room."

Again he studied Alan, who sat motionless and did not speak.

"Corporal Chavasse will take careful note of everything that is said and done. Monsieur Hepburn, I shall see you presently." The panel closed after them.

Alan remained alone, turning slowly round and round, wondering from which wall she would appear, wondering what the first sight of her would be like.

Suddenly, a door-catch clicked in the wall directly behind him.

Another panel rolled open, and her reflected image sprang up in the wall opposite. Madeleine was so exactly like his last memory of her, looking at him mutely on the night he went away, that for an instant he doubted the reality of the mirrored presence. Here, in the reek of gunpowder, it was all unreal.

Madeleine took an uncertain step forward. The panel rolled shut, and Alan whipped round to face her . . .

★ ***The Second Part of "Black Sabre," by John Dickson Carr, appears in next month's Argosy on sale May 10th.***

ARGOSY PRIZE CROSSWORD NO. 21

We are pleased to announce the five winners of Argosy's Twenty-First Prize Crossword Competition:—

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Mrs. D. B. Leng, Malmesbury, Wilts.

These readers who sent in the first correct solutions to be checked on the closing date, each receive a one-guinea book token.

SOLUTION

Across. 1, *Pasties.* 5, *Whippet.* 9, *Realm.* 10, *Ourselves.* 11, *Soluble.* 12, *Angelus.* 13, *Triplicate.* 16, *Log.* 19, *Ate.* 20, *Wild beasts.* 22, *Tarpeia.* 23, *Ant-hill.* 25, *Blue blood.* 26, *Islet.* 27, *Overrun.* 28, *Raymond.*

Down. 1, *Parasite.* 2, *Stall.* 3, *Immobile.* 4, *Slope.* 5, *Warranted.* 6, *Ice age.* 7, *Pavilions.* 8, *Tasks.* 14, *Interlude.* 15, *Chinatown.* 17, *Lent lily.* 18, *Isolated.* 21, *Member.* 22, *Taboo.* 23, *Adder.* 24, *Igloo.*

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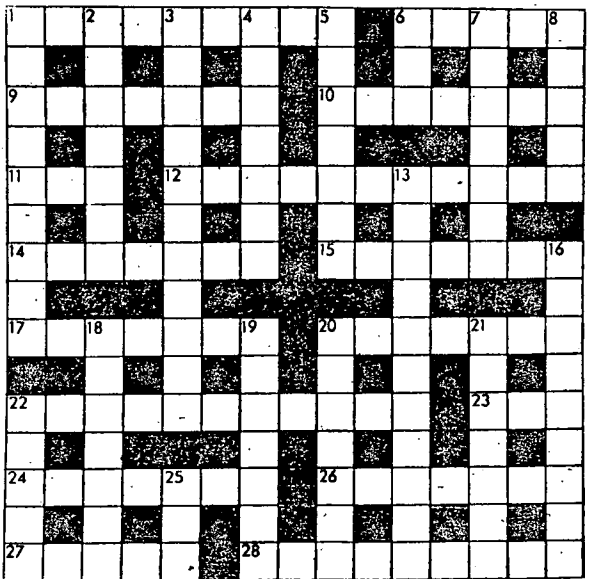
PRIZE CROSS-WORD

No. 24

★

Rules of Entry on Page 109

★



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CUT ALONG THE LINE

CLUES

Across

1 LSD ? Yes, Len—no limit to it (9).

6 If one drops out of purdah, one is in trouble (3, 2).

9 When medical men play around with a musical instrument, it alters (7).

10 This man's more than kin (7).

11 A district attorney can be a lady (3).

12 Pilots do two in one (4, 3, 4).

14 To have a high regard, perhaps (7).

15 A benevolent baronet, no doubt (4, 3).

17 Musically at ease ? (7).

20 It's a fact the whole world knows, that they are happier without their toes (7).

22 Cambridge mathematicians seem argumentative (11).

23 Something to chew over (3).

24 Royal Engineers round the bend (7).

26 One star gives high offence (7).

27 An edible sweetheart (5).

28 Half suffices—it's just a small cup (4-5).

Down

1 An avenue of French gold —that's worth trying for ! (9).

2 Mix a neat drink to bring you down (7).

3 This flower sounds like a good bargain (11).

4 Lost ? Yes, I have it much at heart (7).

5 This beast has a broken tusk, in Siberia (7).

6 A feathery Scottish endearment (3).

7 Adam loses his head over his offspring—they're all in a jam now (7).

8 You do it to hems and pretty girls (3, 2).

13 One way of reaching the House of Lords (11).

16 It is often desirable (9).

18 A classical tough (7).

19 The palm that is as oily as greed (7).

20 "—— ——'s a-cold" (Shakespeare) (4, 3).

21 A back street out of place—a plague on't ! (7).

22 A couturier of value (5).

25 On losing this friend, Al becomes downright common (3).

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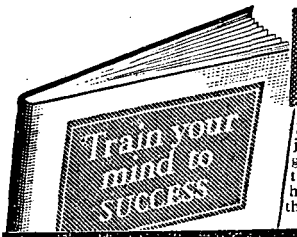

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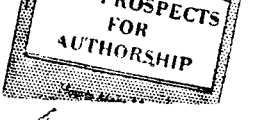

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